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No. 34

Orestes Brownson's Approach to the Problem of God

A Critical Examination in the Light of the Principles of St. Thomas Aquinas

BY THE

REVEREND BERTIN FARRELL, C.P., S.T.L.

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Sacred Theology of The Catholic University of America in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology

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St. Thomas Aquinas

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INTRODUCTION

The history of Theology at the beginning of the nineteenth century is far from brilliant.[1] The situation can be accounted for by various causes. In France the intellectual atmosphere was still saturated with the thought of Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Encyclopedists. Besides the incredulity of the eighteenth century, Catholic Dogma found in Jansenism an enemy within its own ranks. This tenacious heresy became the unconscious auxiliary of the Voltairian spirit of the times by throwing discredit on the doctrine and the institutions of the Church.[2]

Beyond the Rhine conditions were still less favorable for a vigorous expression of Catholic thought at the turn of the century. Intoxicated in the person of her natural leaders by the Aufklärung, the Church had been enervated by Febronianism[3] and enslaved by Josephism.[4] In this weakened condition the Church had been robbed by the great Secularization of 1803 and laid prostrate at the feet of the petty princes and the Prussian bureaucracy. Under the reform of the Sacristan Emperor state

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[1] J. Bellamy, *La théologie catholique au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne and Cie, 3rd ed., 1904), p. 1. "Et ce n'est pas sans réelle tristesse que l'on constate la décadence où etait tombée la science sacrée depuis trente ou quarante ans environ. Le dernier tiers du dix-huitième siècle pesait lourdement sur les premières générations du dix-neuvième, à tel point que la vie théologique paraissait complètement ètoufée au lendemain de la révolution française."

[2] See *ibid.*, p. 4.

[3] Febronianism was a German variety of episcopal Gallicanism. It was a system formulated by Nicholas von Hontheim. It taught that the Pope was not superior to bishops in council and that the power of the Holy See in Germany was limited. It was an eighteenth century product the lingering effects of which were still felt in the nineteenth century. See R. Corrigan, *The Church and the Nineteenth Century* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1938), p. 304.

[4] Josephism was the Imperial Austrian analogue of Royal Gallicanism. Joseph II asserted a complete control over the Church, and meddled in the details of worship, discipline, and doctrine. See *ibid.*, p. 305.

supervision of ecclesiastical studies worked untold harm on the intellectual formation of the German clergy. The teaching of Dogma and exegesis was impregnated with rationalism. Professors of history modeled their lectures on the manuals of their Protestant colleagues. The Faculty of Canon Law devoted itself to the task of weakening the authority of the Papacy. No cleric could receive Sacred Orders until he had submitted himself to this rationalistic training of theologians who knew no God other than the Emperor.[5]

In Italy the situation was not much better. The famous Synod of Pistoia attempted to secure a foothold in Italy for Jansenism and allied errors. The fact that 233 members signed the acts in the final session reveals the unhealthy state of mind existing in a large portion of the Italian Clergy at that time. Moreover the suppression of the Jesuits deprived many of the theological chairs in Rome of their masters. All in all the time was hardly favorable to studies, neither during the violence of the French Revolution, which had its counterpart in Rome, nor during the persecution of the Napoleonic period.[6]

In spite of and because of these discouraging conditions there arose in the nineteenth century men who challenged the spirit of the times and vigorously vindicated the claims of the Church over the minds and hearts of men. The cumulative effect of their efforts constituted a genuine theological renaissance which gradually made itself felt throughout the Catholic world.[7] The path of this movement was not always smooth and in many instances the Church had to moderate the enthusiasm of some of its proponents by indicating the false direction they were taking.

This accounts for a series of Papal pronouncements and decrees of various Congregations which were calculated to sift the chaff from the wheat in the new movement. The excess of Traditionalism, as advocated by Viscount Louis de Bonald, Félicité de Lamennais, and Augustine Bonnetty was pointed out by Gregory XVI in two encyclicals, *Mirari vos* and *Singulari nos,* and by a decision of the Sacred Congregation of the Index. The semi-

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[5] See J. Bellamy, *op. cit.,* p. 4.
[6] See *ibid.,* p. 5.
[7] See R. Corrigan, *op. cit.,* p. 75.

rationalism of Hermes was condemned by the Brief, *Dum acerbissimas;* that of Günther by the Brief *Eximiam tuam;* and that of Frohschammer by the Letter, *Gravissimas inter.* The extremely subtle error of Ontologism was stigmatized in 1861 as a doctrine which could not be safely taught.

An impressive list of scholars contributed their talents to the multi-faceted theological renaissance of the nineteenth century. A group of able Bishops in France: Dupanloup, Freppel, Pie; the remarkable English Cardinals: Wiseman, Manning, Newman; Balmes and Donoso Cortes in Spain. In Ireland Maynooth became a center and stronghold of Catholic thought. Historical scholarship of a high caliber flourished in Germany. Besides the epochal *Symbolik* of Möhler, which demolished Protestant argument, and the multiform writings of Görres, there was the work of Döllinger and the rest of the Munich School. And when Döllinger wrecked his brilliant career by his apostasy, Hergenrother and Hefele more than supplied the lost erudition.[8] To these must be added the able figures of the Neo-Scholastic revival, such as Liberatore, Kleutgen, Zigliara, Stöckl, to mention only a few. While this intellectual movement was progressing in the Old World a man who is the subject of this dissertation was gradually making his way to the door of the Catholic Church in the New World.

Orestes Augustus Brownson was born Sept. 16, 1803, at Stockbridge, Vermont.[9] At the age of six he went to live with an aged couple in the nearby town of Royalton.[10] Here he learned the Shorter Catechism, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a short evening prayer in rhyme. But the most he was told was that he must "get religion," "experience religion," "be born again," but no one told him how this was to be brought about.[11] While at Royalton he read the Bible, Jonathan Edward's *A History of the Work of Redemption,* and Locke's *Essay Concerning Human*

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[8] See Louis De Raeymaeker, *Introduction to Philosophy,* translated by Harry McNeill (New York City: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1948), p. 161.

[9] See Henry F. Brownson, *Orestes A. Brownson's Early Life* (Detroit, 1898), p. 3.

[10] See O. A. Brownson, *The Convert, or Leaves From My Experience* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier Co., 1877), p. 1.

[11] See *ibid.,* p. 6.

Understanding.[12] The earliest wish of this studious youth was "to be a minister of religion and to devote myself to the work of bringing people back to the knowledge and love of God."[13]

At the age of fourteen Orestes moved to Ballston Spa, north of Albany. Here he attended an academy in which he learned a little Latin and Greek.[14] His adolescent years were marked with doubt and confusion about religion. With an act of what he called "intellectual desperado" he became a Presbyterian.[15] He had accepted authority because he despaired of reason. But he soon began to doubt the authority with which he had sought refuge, "while the church refused to take the responsibility of telling me what doctrines I must believe, she yet claimed the authority to condemn and excommunicate me as a heretic, if I departed from the standard of doctrine contained in her confession."[16]

Depressed by Calvinism, Brownson now turned towards Universalism. He read the works of Doctor Elhanan Winchester, the founder of American Universalism; but it was Hosea Ballou, the prophet of Universalism in America, who made the deepest impression on him.[17] On the fifteenth of June, 1826, he was ordained a Universalist minister. The newly ordained minister soon found himself on the horns of a dilemma. Universalism taught the eternity of punishment to be contrary to reason; but Scripture nowhere spoke of the salvation of all men. Therefore, he must either reject reason or make reason the judge of Scripture. In passing it might be noticed that this type of *per sic et non* argument is that on which his reputation as a logician rests. He chose, "as was reasonable in my position the latter alternative and rejected the authority of Scripture."[18] His native honesty forced him to take up his position open and above board "not as a disbeliever but as an unbeliever."[19]

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[12] Henry F. Brownson, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
[13] O. A. Brownson, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[14] See Henry F. Brownson, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[15] See O. A. Brownson, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[17] See *ibid.*, p. 36.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Brownson now turned from Christianity to socialism. "My end was man's earthly happiness and my creed was progress."[20] His mind was very nearly balanced between the individualism of William Godwin and the communism of Robert Owen. At this stage of his career Brownson found himself cooperating with "the well-known Frances Wright," who seemed to him to have hit upon a just medium between the two.[21] But Brownson never did agree that all the ills of man were caused by the institutions this trio of reformers wished to overthrow. He began to lose confidence in enlightened self-interest as a means of reforming society. He felt the need of religion of some sort to induce men to make the sacrifices necessary to attain earthly happiness. Therefore, "I accepted religion once more, and resumed my old profession of a preacher, though of what particular Gospel it would be difficult to say."[22]

At this time Brownson's creed consisted of the simplest elements of natural religion.[23] He had become a believer in humanity and put humanity in the place of God.[24] Now Dr. Channing's writings drew Brownson's attention to the Unitarians, a denomination with which he had previously no acquaintance. "I offered myself to a Unitarian Congregation in the Summer of 1832, and was accepted and settled as their minister."[25] Through his Unitarian friends Brownson was introduced to the French Philosophers;[26] Benjamin Constant, Victor Cousin, and Pierre Leroux. It was at this time that he organized and began publishing the *Boston Quarterly Review,*[27] a magazine devoted to philosophy, history, sociology, political philosophy, and religion.

In July, 1840, Brownson published in his *Review* his famous "Essay on the Laboring Classes." In this article he attacked and sought to abolish the Church, the priesthood, marriage, private

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[21] See *ibid.*, p. 89.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[23] See *ibid.*, p. 111.
[24] *Ibid., loc. cit.*
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 114.
[26] T. Maynard, *Orestes Brownson, Yankee, Radical, Catholic* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 54.
[27] See O. A. Brownson, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

property, the factory system, the banking system, and almost all existing institutions, as indications of inequalities, and therefore, wholly inconsistent with the democratic theory. The publication of this Essay marked the crisis in what Brownson himself called his "mental disease."[28]

He now began a re-examination of the premises furnished him by his non-Catholic friends and democratic countrymen. The result was that he "became henceforth a conservative in politics, instead of an impracticable radical, and through political conservatism, I advanced rapidly toward religious conservatism."[29] He dated his "beginning to amend, from the publication of my so-called horrible doctrines."[30]

The progress Brownson made in this re-examination of premises is revealed in a series of articles written for the *Christian World* on "The Mission of Jesus." The first two pleased the Unitarians, the third was praised by a Puritan Journal, the fourth delighted the Tractarians, and the next three were commented upon favorably, and in part reprinted, by some Catholic periodicals. But the eighth, which was to answer the question, "Which is the True Church?" *The Christian World* refused to publish. And though a Catholic editor offered to do so, Brownson refused to let him have it. After some delay and hesitation Brownson finally heeded the promptings of divine grace and placed himself under the instruction of Bishop Fitzpatrick. He was received into the Church on the twentieth of October, 1844.

Such in brief is the story of Brownson's conversion. A detailed biographical account of his life can be found in the three-volume work of his son, Henry F. Brownson, and in the one volume works of his more recent biographers, Arthur Schlesinger, Theodore Maynard, and Doran Whalen (Sister Rose Gertrude Whalen).

On the advice of Bishop Fitzpatrick Brownson began to devote the pages of his *Review* to the defense of the Church. His vigorous apostolate merits for him a place amongst those illustrious men already mentioned who were contributing in various ways to the

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[28] See *ibid.*, p. 198.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 200.
[30] *Ibid., loc. cit.*

theological renaissance of the nineteenth century. Among the many questions to which Brownson gave a great deal of time and consideration was one which might be called "the problem of God." Because his approach to this problem represents a radical departure from the traditional method of proving the existence of God it has been chosen as the object of this dissertation, which is a critical study of Brownson's approach to the problem of God in the light of the principles of Saint Thomas and the relevant decisions of the Church. An attempt will be made to determine whether Brownson made, on this particular question, any real and lasting contribution to the theological movement of the nineteenth century.

The very nature of the study seems to dictate the following sequence of chapters. The first chapter will treat of Brownson and scholasticism. The second will indicate what Brownson considered the proper setting of the problem of God should be. The third will examine Brownson's criticism of the *quinque viae* and attempt to evaluate his own proof for the existence of God. The last two will study the charge of ontologism which was leveled against Brownson's approach to the problem of God.

The author takes this occasion to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to his former provincial superior, Very Rev. Carrol Ring, C.P., for the opportunity of engaging in graduate study at The Catholic University of America and to his present provincial superior, Very Rev. Gabriel Gorman, C.P., for the opportunity of completing this work under ideal conditions. To his local superior, Rev. Timothy McDermott, C.P., he is grateful for many kindnesses shown him while at the University. Special gratitude is due to his major professor, Rev. Dr. Edmond D. Benard, for his scholarly supervision of and genuine interest in this work. For the reading of the manuscript and their helpful suggestions the author is grateful to Rev. Dr. Francis J. Connell, C.SS.R., and to Rev. Dr. Louis A. Arand, S.S. Finally, he wishes to thank the many others who in various ways have aided him in the completion of his work.

CHAPTER I

Brownson and Scholasticism

Orestes Brownson's philosophical position is by no means as clear as his religious position. It is fairly easy to follow Brownson through the various phases of Protestantism to the door of the Catholic Church. But it is not so easy to grasp the foundation on which a large part of his apologetical writings were built. This is due, to a large extent, to the fact that a complete analysis of his philosophy has yet to be written. For this reason it is deemed advisable to give what might be called the general orientation of his thought in order that his approach to the problem of God might be seen in its proper perspective. So, in this chapter, Brownson's thought will be discussed in relation to Scholasticism; in the next chapter, a summary of the specific elements which differentiate his approach from the traditional treatment of the same question will be given.

In 1861 Brownson clearly indicated what might be expected from him in the field of Catholic thought:

> We did not come into the Catholic Church to turn Catholic reformer, to reform Catholic faith, Catholic theology, or Catholic discipline; we try to learn and hold Catholic faith as the Church believes and teaches it, and to make the best use of reason in our power in defending it against the various classes of adversaries it at present encounters.[1]

He seemed to consider that independence in philosophical thinking was the surest guarantee for "the best use of reason."

> We, in this age and country, have all the means of arriving at the knowledge of philosophical truth that Plato or Aristotle, St. Augustine, or St. Thomas had, and

[1] "Philosophy of Revelation" (1861), *Works,* II, 141.

> if we fail to attain to it, it is because we fail to make a wise and free use of the means in our reach, because we suffer our intellectual life to be crushed out by the authority of antiquity, or by the superincumbent weight of scholastic systems.[2]

This did not mean that he wished the great thinkers of the past to be ignored:

> Great names in philosophy, as Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventura, Suarez, Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Hume, Reid, Berkeley, Leibnitz, Gerdil, Kant, Fichte, Cousin, Vico, Rosmini, Galluppi, Gioberti, may be consulted and should be, not as absolute authorities, but for their testimony as to what may be presumed to be the principles and dictates of reason. Their opinions enlighten our reason but do not supersede it or conclude it.[3]

In appraising Brownson's philosophical position it is well to keep in mind what he has said of himself:

> It is due to ourselves to say, that we have never attempted to set forth a philosophical theory of our own, and in discussing, in hastily prepared essays, various philosophical questions, for a special purpose and under a special aspect, which is all we have done, it is very likely, even when our general views were just, we have used expressions which are too exclusive, and which need more or less qualification.[4]

This explains, to a certain extent, such statements as: "on certain questions we undoubtedly sympathize with the so-called Ontologists,"[5] and "our natural tendency, no doubt, has been to sympathize with the Traditionalists. . . ."[6]

Having no system of his own Brownson seemed to apply the principle of eclecticism to other systems: "for ourselves, we felt

[2] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 492.
[3] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 513.
[4] "What Human Reason Can Do" (1855), *Works,* I, 306.
[5] "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 280.
[6] "What Human Reason Can Do" (1855), *Works,* I, 306.

that to ascertain and accept the truth of different schools is the best way to refute their errors."[7] Not only did he follow no school but he called no man master. "There is no name in philosophy that we respect more than we do that of St. Thomas, but in philosophy we swear by the words of no human master."[8] In his plea for philosophical independence Brownson frequently grouped together Christian and non-Christian thinkers without any apparent discrimination:

> But in philosophy, we hold ourselves bound by the opinions of no man, and can accept as authority from which there lies no appeal, neither Plato nor Aristotle, St. Augustine nor St. Thomas, Descartes nor Malebranche, Locke nor Leibnitz, Rosmini nor Gioberti, Rothenflue nor Liberatori. So long as we run athwart no article, dogma, or proposition of faith, we are free to follow our own judgment and convictions.[9]

Although Brownson avowed his preference in many respects for Plato he professed that "we do not always consider him a safe guide,"[10] and maintained that "we dare not take him for a master."[11] In answer to various objections to his own position he said of Aristotle: "must I, too, take that pagan philosopher as *Magister,* as *Philosophus,* whose *dictum* is authority in every matter pertaining to the province of human reason?"[12] Saint Thomas fares little better at the hands of Brownson, for, "St. Thomas, when he uses natural reason as a theologian in face of the dogma, seldom if ever, errs, but when he leaves theology, and speaks *ex professo,* as an independent philosopher, he is a peripatetic, and can by no means always be followed with perfect security."[13] Moreover, while Brownson held that "prior to the perfection of the Giobertian formula, philosophy was not, and

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[7] *Ibid.,* 323.
[8] *Ibid.,* 320.
[9] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 491.
[10] "Gratry on the Knowledge of God" (1855), *Works,* I, 340.
[11] *Ibid.,* 342.
[12] "Various Objections Answered" (1861), *Works,* XX, 139.
[13] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 420.

could not be a science,"[14] still, "neither in philosophy nor in theology are we disposed to take him for our master or our guide."[15]

Brownson had profound respect and admiration for the medieval scholastics:

> I love and revere as much as any man can the great scholastics of the middle ages. The *Summa Theologica* of the Angel of the Schools has for me as many miracles as articles, and when studied as it should be, it gives one the sum of all theology and philosophy.[16]

When Professor Park of the Andover Theological Seminary wrote an article in which he cast aspersions on the "niceties of the schoolmen" Brownson sprang to their defense:

> It is easy to sneer at the "niceties of the schoolmen," but not so easy to comprehend them. This sneer is on the lips and in the tone or words of no man who has any knowledge or comprehension of the schoolmen. . . . We have heard enough of sneers at the schoolmen,—sneers born of ignorance and conceit which always accompanies it. Go and master the schoolmen, then you may sneer at them, if you will.[17]

He rebuked Dr. Frohschamer for making war on the scholastics and expressed the wish that our age were back and up to the level of these great and earnest men:

> There is more in these old men than the best of us are now able to see. Let our philosophers understand them, master their thought, and we shall have little cause of complaint against them, for the defects in these old scholastics are easily supplied once we fairly understand them.[18]

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[14] *Ibid.*, 418.
[15] "Philosophy of Revelation" (1861), *Works,* II, 140.
[16] "Uncle Jack and His Nephew" (1854), *Works,* XI, 222.
[17] "Professor Park against Catholicity" (1845), *Works,* VI, 404.
[18] "Reform and Reformers" (1863), *Works,* XX, 306.

Despite this manifest respect and admiration it is definitely an overstatement to affirm that Brownson "had mastered the outstanding points of Scholastic philosophy."[19] A casual acquaintance with the philosophical writings of Brownson would seem to indicate the impossibility of making him a scholastic in any sense of the word. The nature of this study demands that this contention be given some consideration because Brownson's failure to master the outstanding points of scholastic philosophy determined to a large extent his approach to the problem of God. In treating of this aspect of Brownson's thought strict chronological order will be sacrificed for the sake of a more or less synthetic approach. This approach seems justified by the fact that Brownson's philosophical observations never followed any particular order but were determined by the particular review he happened to be writing at the time.

Brownson preferred Aristotle to Plato as a philosopher[20] but he considered Platonism more profound than Aristotelianism:

> The Platonic Philosophy is no doubt exposed to dangers from which the Aristotelian is free. . . . But there can be really no doubt that it is far profounder than the Aristotelian philosophy, and penetrates to an order of ideas to which Aristotle was a stranger, and which cannot be brought within the comprehension of a rigid peripateticism.[21]

By the same token he considered Augustinianism more profound than Thomism and, after Saint Paul, he looked upon Saint Augustine as "the profoundest philosopher that has ever lived."[22] In the same article he repeated once more his preference for Augustine:

> We may be very wrong, but, as at present informed, we think the philosophy that is represented by St. Augus-

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[19] S. A. Raemers, *America's Foremost Philosopher* (Washington, D. C.: St. Anselm's Priory, 1931), p. 16.

[20] See "Holy Communion" (1874), *Works,* VIII, 271.

[21] "Liberalism and Socialism" (1855), *Works,* X, 531.

[22] "Holy Communion" (1874), *Works,* VIII, 277.

> tine is more in accordance with Catholic dogma, which never varies, than either scholastic philosophy or our contemporary philosophy. . . . This may be our fault; but though we prefer Aristotle, as a philosopher, to Plato, we do not think anything has really been gained by casting philosophy and theology into a peripatetic mould. We reverence St. Thomas on this side of idolatry, but St. Augustine is more congenial to the age in which we live, and, we confess it, to our mind and temperament.[23]

This avowed preference explains, to a certain extent, why Brownson found much to complain of in the Scholastics. He contended that they enslaved philosophy to Aristotle:

> They [the Scholastics] did not reject philosophy, but enslaved it, first, to the clergy, and secondly, to Aristotle. As they held and were obliged to hold that the Bible interpreted by the Church was authoritative in matters of revelation or faith, so they held and insisted that all should hold that the writings of Aristotle interpreted by the professors, was authority in all matters of reason or science. He who departed from Aristotle was treated as a heretic in science, as he who departed from the bible was a heretic in religion.[24]

He maintained that the Scholastics contributed nothing to the philosophical tradition handed down by the pagan philosophers:

> We have never, in the little study we have devoted to them, been able to discover anything new or peculiar in their method, or to lay our finger on a single purely philosophical problem of which they, as philosophers, have offered a new or original solution. As theologians, they were, as a matter of course, since they had the Christian revelation, infinitely in advance of the Gentile philosophers, but as philosophers they added nothing to what had been transmitted to them from their Gentile ancestors.[25]

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[23] *Ibid.*, 271.

[24] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 237.

[25] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 493.

At one time Brownson seemed to think that the attention given to Aristotle by the scholastics affected the moral and intellectual state which conditioned the revival and triumph of heathen literature in the fifteenth century:

> The Scholastic Philosophy, in its progress necessarily involved this revival. Ancient heathen literature once revived, and everywhere studied as an authority, faith in the Church could hardly be maintained, and must continue to become every day more and more difficult; for this literature did not contain, or at least very imperfectly, the Christian ontology, and therefore, in proportion as it took possession of the mind of the scholar, must it obscure his perception of the real sense of the Church. The Schoolmen were carried away, by their discussion, into the society of the peripatetics, Jews, and Arabs, away from the deep meaning of the Church.[26]

Finally he concluded the scholastic method unsuited to the form of controversy demanded by the nineteenth century:

> Even the *Summa Contra Gentes,* of St. Thomas, perfectly conclusive as it is against all who reject the Church, is by no means adapted to the state of the non-catholic mind of this age and country. Very few non-catholics are able to recognize their own objection in those stated and refuted by the Angelic Doctor.[27]

Saint Thomas, himself, fares little better at the hand of Brownson than do the scholastics in general. He claimed that we are very much in the position as to the philosophical teaching of Saint Thomas that Protestants are to the teaching of Holy Scripture: "Each one finds in him the doctrine which he learns elsewhere and brings it to him."[28] He admits that Saint Thomas had philosophical genius of the highest order but maintains that "he never was a free and independent philosopher."[29] He accuses Saint Thomas of so scrupulously following Aristotle that he

[26] "Kant's Critique of Pure Reason" (1844), *Works,* I, 147.
[27] "Collard on Faith and Reason" (1856), *Works,* III, 205.
[28] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 490.
[29] *Ibid.,* 492.

"never in the slightest particular deviates from him, unless compelled to by revealed dogma."[30] "No man," he says, "however ingenious can free his [St. Thomas'] philosophy from the charge of conceptualism," or "reconcile his peripatetic maxim, *nihil est in intellectu, quod prius non fuerit in sensu,* with the ontology presupposed by faith."[31] After acknowledging that Saint Thomas was a great theologian, "a man of rare gifts; who knew and loved the truth," he condemns the Angelic Doctor with faint praise by adding that "he would adhere to the truth, whether he adhered to his system or not, and much preferred contradicting himself to contradicting that."[32]

So much for Brownson's appraisal of Scholasticism in general. Attention will now be given to a few of the positions maintained by the *philosophia perennis*—in contrast to Brownson's expressed views, in order to show that he far from mastered the outstanding points of Scholastic philosophy.

One such fundamental point is the doctrine of analogy which plays an extremely important role in the proofs for the existence of God. Cardinal Cajetan claims that without an understanding of the doctrine of analogy it is impossible to acquire a knowledge of metaphysics.[33] The importance of analogy in the thought of Saint Thomas literally cannot be overestimated. There is not a problem either in the order of being, or in the order of knowing, or in the order of predicating which does not for its ultimate solution depend on the principle of analogy.[34] So true is this that analogy has been called "the foundation of the natural theology of St. Thomas."[35] In the light of these observations it is somewhat

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[30] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 237. See "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 493.

[31] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 420. See "Explanation to Catholics" (1864), *Works,* XX, 374.

[32] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 420.

[33] See Thomas De Vio Cardinalis Caietanus, *Scripta philosophia, De nominum analogia, De conceptu entis,* edited by P. N. Zammit, O.P. (Rome: apud Institutum Angelicum, 1934), p. 3.

[34] See G. B. Phelan, *St. Thomas and Analogy* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1941), p. 1.

[35] H. Renard, *The Philosophy of Being* (2nd ed.; Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1947), p. 101.

surprising to hear Brownson say that the peripatetic use of the term *ens* is unphilosophical:

> The practice of the schools, of using the term *ens* indiscriminately for being and existence, real being and possible being, necessary being and contingent being,—as if the contingent and the necessary, the possible and the real, the creature and the Creator, could be put in the same category—is as unphilosophical as anything well can be, and seldom fails to have a most injurious effect on our speculations.[36]

It is clear from this quotation that Brownson missed the analogical character of being. Lest this inference seem unwarranted there is another passage in which he explicitly denied that the scholastics ever used the term *ens* in an analogical sense:

> It is to no manner of purpose to admonish us that *ens* when applied to man is not used in the same sense—*univoce*—as when applied to God, and therefore, that God and man are not included in the same genus, for the scholastic term *ens* has really but one meaning, and is always used, whatever may be said to the contrary, *univoce. Ens finitum,* in that it is *ens,* does, in no sense, differ from *ens infinitum,* and *ens secundum quid,* if *ens* at all, is *ens simpliciter.* Being, if being, is always one and identical; and limited being unless we use the term loosely for existence or *existentia,* is a contradiction in terms.[37]

It would seem that Brownson never grasped the real significance of the scholastic teaching in regard to the nature of logic. Logic was the only part of philosophy he set much store by and if he entered into the discussion of higher metaphysical problems it was only to make sure of a logic which conforms to the real order of things.[38] So insistent was he on this point that he once said, "all of philosophy we want taught in our schools may be included

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[36] "Wards Philosophical Introduction" (1861), *Works,* XIV, 374.
[37] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 423.
[38] See "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 280.

under the head of logic. . . ."[39] He maintained that the Aristotelian logic, regarded not as an art but as a science, is essentially defective, and, that it is such, "whether we take it from Aristotle himself, or from the mediaeval or modern scholastics."[40] His condemnation of peripatetic logic flows from the fact that "it proceeds from the principle of contradiction, and deals with possibilities only. . . ."[41] In adopting as the principle of their logic, the principle of contradiction, Brownson thought that "the peripatetics were not truly rational. . . . "[42] For he held they "assumed" that demonstration proceeds from the known to the unknown.[43] He had previously denied that logic proceeds in this way in a criticism of Cardinal Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine,* in which criticism Brownson says, "Mr. Newman, like professors of natural science, has been misled by what in these times is called 'Inductive Philosophy,'—a philosophy which had never had 'a local habitation or a name,' more than other 'airy nothings,' if it had been borne in mind that we have no logic by which we can conclude the unknown from the known."[44] According to Brownson's contention there is "no logic by which we can go from the known to the strictly unknown."[45] So he condemns peripatetic logic because "it professes to proceed from *notum,* or something known, to the unknown, by way of demonstration. But this is no more than a Cartesian would say."[46] In his, "Essay in Refutation of Atheism," there is another passage which seems to indicate that Brownson missed the real significance of Aristotelian logic, "the modern peripatetics for the most part, make the categories purely formal, and gravely tell us that a proposition may be logically true yet really false."[47]

The scholastic theory of knowledge gave Brownson much difficulty. Again his criticism is vitiated by his lack of understanding

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[39] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 497.
[40] *Ibid.,* 497.
[41] *Ibid.,* 509. See "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 528.
[42] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 517.
[43] See "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 284.
[44] "Newman's Development of Christian Doctrine" (1846), *Works,* XIV, 8.
[45] "An a Priori Autobiography" (1850), *Works,* I, 222.
[46] "The Problem of Causality" (1855), *Works,* I, 401.
[47] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 48.

of its cardinal points. The attempt to preserve the scholastic terminology while rejecting its original meanings makes it difficult to grasp his own system. He considered it absurd to place the "*principium* of cognition in sensation,"[48] and, as a result, did not "accept the doctrine that our cognition begins in the sense, or the sensible species."[49] He saw, more or less clearly, that abstraction would play a very important role in the scholastic theory of cognition as a consequence of making sensation the point of departure of intellection. But he seemed to think that the scholastic axiom, *nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu,* rendered the refutation of modern sensism impossible.[50] Moreover, he seemed to consider that the process of abstraction caused the scholastics to reason in a vicious circle:

> This abstraction they suppose the intellect is competent to make by its own powers, and does make, as St. Thomas says, *dividendo et componendo,* or by ratiocination. Hence we find them uniformly, after Aristotle, and like all our modern inductionists, reasoning in a *vicious* circle. They tell us all knowledge begins *a sensu,* and that through the senses we know only particulars, and universals, genera and species, are obtained by reasoning, abstracting them from the particulars. Experience furnished the particulars, and reason by way of induction obtains from them the universals, which, reapplied to particulars, give sapientia, or wisdom, the end of philosophy. But they also tell us that all reasoning, all demonstration, proceeds from universals to particulars! So they assume universals in order to get particulars, and particulars in order to get universals. They prove their particulars by their universals, and their universals by their particulars. The universals are obtained by reasoning, and yet there is no reasoning without universals. And we are to be held up to ridicule and made the butt of Italian wit, because we cannot accept this as sound logic! Yet no man who has made himself even superficially acquainted with the Aristotelian logic can deny that it involves this *vicious* circle.[51]

[48] "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 288.
[49] *Ibid.,* 287.
[50] See "Various Objections Answered" (1861), *Works,* II, 139.
[51] Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 288.

The origin of the peripatetic theory of perception through species and phantasms puzzled Brownson. Plato's theory he could understand, ". . . but Aristotle's doctrine of forms and phantasms, intermediary between the intellect and objective reality, we do not understand, that is, we do not understand precisely what fact he sought to explain by it."[52] Then, reverting to a favorite thesis of his, he had no difficulty accounting for the appearance of this theory in the Scholastics and more recent philosophers, "for they simply repeat their master and one another."[53] From this quotation alone it seems as though Brownson not only did not understand precisely what fact Aristotle sought to explain by the species and phantasms but also that he did not understand their nature or function in the peripatetic theory of cognition. As a result his treatment of this theory follows a very definite pattern. Whenever he speaks of the phantasms or species it is either to reject them or to interpret them in the light of his own theory of intuition and reflection; and he does this even within the confines of a single article.

In his article, "Schools of Philosophy," written in 1854, he seemed to admit the existence of the species and phantasms but gave a rather distorted version of their function in cognition:

> We know according to them [the Scholastics] only by means of phantasms and intelligible species; but when we have penetrated to the real fact which they mean to assert, we shall find that the phantasms are simply the means by which we actually cognize sensible or corporeal things, and the intelligible species are the means by which we really apprehend intelligibles, or incorporeal things.[54]

Then, a little farther on in the same article, he completely rejects the scholastic theory of phantasms and intelligible species as untenable. He claims that the mistake of Aristotle was not so much in denying the distinct intuition of the universals, as it was in supposing that reflection originally obtained them by abstraction

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[52] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 511.

[53] *Ibid.,* 511.

[54] "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 285.

from the sensible species, and, since the scholastics were in this question only following Aristotle, he informs them that by:

> Correcting these mistakes, dismissing their vexatious phantasms and the intelligible species, and understanding that we stand face to face with reality, whether corporeal or incorporeal, spiritual or material, intelligible or sensible, with nothing but the intelligible light of God between as the medium of both intelligible and sensible intuition, they might easily find themselves in accord with the Catholic ontologists, and their philosophy corresponding to the order of things.[55]

This process of alternately rejecting and reinterpreting the scholastic theory of knowledge is constantly appearing in Brownson's writings. In 1853, he wrote that "the old scholastic doctrine of ideas as something intermediary between subject and object, neither one nor the other, yet something by means of which subject and object are brought into relation, is in the commonly received interpretation thoroughly exploded."[56] Later on he attempted to explain the true sense of the terminology and while he shows some insight into it he gives it a rather peculiar twist by such expressions as:

> The doctrine of St. Thomas, as we understand it, is that man is intelligent by virtue of a created light, or reason, which is made to the image and likeness of the Divine reason, and therefore contains in itself, in a participated sense, the ideas, types, *species,* or images of whatever we are capable of knowing.[57]

In the same vein of thought he protested that "we cannot admit this *phantastic* origin of ideas."[58] Again, he maintains:

> Reid dispelled, forever, the Peripatetic phantasms, and proved that in sensibles we perceive the things themselves, not their images, phantasms, or immaterial repre-

[55] *Ibid.,* 290.
[56] "J. H. V. on Brownson's Review" (1853), *Works,* XIV, 324.
[57] "What Human Reason Can Do" (1855), *Works,* I, 321.
[58] *Ibid.,* 312.

> sentatives. Malebranche, after Plato and St. Augustine and others, had previously done the same thing in regard to the non-sensible world.[59]

The intermediary world of ideas he considered to have been "successfully assailed by the Scottish school."[60] This was repeated again when he said of Dr. Porter's theory of representation that it "only replaces the phantasms and intelligible species of the schoolmen, forever made away with, we had supposed, by the Scottish school of Reid and Hamilton."[61] It is true that many passages may be adduced in which Brownson points out that what the scholastics meant by the phantasms and species is not what is commonly supposed by critics of their system.[62] However, when he begins to give what he considers their true meaning the result is a distortion which leaves the terminology without the meaning. He concluded one such passage with these words:

> What is necessary to place philosophy on a solid basis is to explode entirely the representative theory invented by Aristotle to reconcile his maxim, *nihil est in intellectu, quod prius non fuerit in sensu,* with the undeniable truth in the Platonic theory, and retained by St. Thomas, in his unsuccessful attempt to harmonize Aristotle and St. Augustine.[63]

According to Brownson, what the scholastics really meant by their phantasms and intelligible species is simply the mediating light furnished by God, Himself, who is Himself the light and the Father of lights.[64] Again, the Scholastics never made the phantasm and intelligible species the product of the mind, or mental creations, and the reason he adduces for this is that if they had they "would have called them the species *intellective,* not *intelligible* species."[65]

The influence of the Scottish philosophy on his thought emerges

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[59] "Dignity of Human Reason" (1857), *Works,* I, 449.
[60] "An Old Quarrel" (1867), *Works,* II, 293.
[61] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 411.
[62] See "An Old Quarrel" (1867), *Works,* II, 297.
[63] "Dignity of Human Reason" (1857), *Works,* I, 449.
[64] See "An Old Quarrel" (1867), *Works,* II, 297.
[65] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 411.

as a significant factor from Brownson's treatment of the nature and function of the phantasm and the intelligible species. Reid extended his criticism of Cartesianism to Scholasticism and claimed that in both systems what the mind perceives is not an external object but only a subjective modification which is an image of the object.[66] Now, as mentioned above, passages may be adduced in which Brownson protested that this "was never held, as the moderns have supposed by the sounder scholastics."[67] Brownson admitted that St. Thomas held the intelligible species to be that by which the mind attains to the cognition of the intelligible, "not that in which it terminates, and that what the mind really obtains or apprehends through them is the intelligible object itself."[68] But, as the following quotation will show, it is clear that he ultimately rejected the scholastic interpretation of the role of the phantasm and intelligible species in cognition:

> We know St. Thomas asserts that the intelligible form or *species* is that by which the mind attains to the intelligible, not that in which it terminates; but we do not know that either he or his master, Aristotle proves it, or proves that the intellect attains, in any instance whatever, to any thing in the intelligible order beyond the intelligible form or *species,* or in the sensible world beyond the phantasms furnished by the senses. It is one thing to assert, on the strength of theology, or the common belief of mankind, an intelligible and a sensible world existing *a parte rei,* and another to prove it by our logic and philosophy. St. Thomas was a great man, a great theologian, seldom, if ever surpassed in history, and he knew and told infinitely more truth than can be compressed into the philosophical theory of Aristotle, or any other "heathen Greek." Nobody pretends that he did not know and assert objective reality, in both the intelligible and sensible order; but his philosophy never allows him to admit that we have immediate intuition of the intelligible reality. As a peripatetic, he holds that what in every fact of knowledge is immediately present to the mind is never the objective

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[66] See W. Turner, *History of Philosophy* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1903), p. 593.

[67] "Bushnell's Discourses" (1849), *Works,* VII, 47.

[68] "What Human Reason Can Do" (1855), *Works,* I, 321.

> reality itself, but a certain image, representation, immaterial form, or intelligible *species*—the peripatetic interpretation of the Platonic *idea.* Hence, in the peripatetic philosophy, the ideal is not precisely the intellective subject, not the intelligible object *a parte rei,* but a certain intermediary, distinguishable both from the mind and from the objective reality and serving to unite them, or, as it is pretended, to bring them into mutual relation. But as what is immediately present to the mind is the image, form, or *species,* not the thing itself, how is the mind to know that there is any *thing* there, that the whole world is not merely ideal, mere form, or *species?* This question is unanswerable on the peripatetic philosophy, as taught by St. Thomas, or as taught in our modern schools, as the interminable disputes respecting it fully evince.[69]

The *intellectus agens* undergoes much the same treatment as the phantasms and the intelligible species. In regard to the function of the *intellectus agens* Brownson offers the following observation:

> It is not the *intellectus agens* that renders the intelligible intelligible *in actu,* as the Scholastics teach, but the intelligible is itself by its own light intelligible *in actu* and it is the concurrence of its intelligibility *in actu* with our own intellective faculty that forms the intuition.[70]

And he accepted the consequence of such an interpretation by asserting in the same text:

> But the reader will perceive that, in representing the intelligible as intelligible *in actu,* we reject the *intellectus agens* of the Scholastics, as a created light, or participated reason, and therefore, the intelligible species and phantasms.[71]

For Brownson the *intellectus agens* is "truly and literally God immanent in our intellect,"[72] and, according to him, St. Thomas

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[69] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), I, 510.
[70] "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 304.
[71] *Ibid., loc. cit.*
[72] "Dignity of Human Reason" (1857), *Works,* I, 455.

"does not regard the *intellectus agens* as a created intellect,"[73] which statement receives this further elucidation:

> The *intellectus agens,* supposed to furnish the representative ideas, if not the human intellect, as St. Thomas certainly did not hold it to be, is itself the idea, and the idea is not the representative of the intelligible reality, but that reality itself. . . . Hence the *intellectus agens* of Aristotle and the schoolmen is identically the Intelligible or God affirming Himself intuitively as the Intelligible.[74]

This same admission occurs in regard to St. Thomas' teaching concerning the nature of the *lumen rationis:*

> His [St. Thomas'] doctrine is, that no creature can be intelligent or intelligible *per se,* or can either know or be known save as illuminated by the light of reason. The light of reason he says, is a participation of the Divine Light, or *Lumen Dei.* Does he mean that God himself is the light of reason, "the true light which enlighteneth every man coming into this world?" If so, we are agreed, and St. Thomas holds the very doctrine Gioberti and ourselves have been so severely reproached by modern Thomists for defending. But does he distinguish this light of reason from God, and hold it to be *aliquid creatum,* something created, distinguishable from the light of God, as the creature from the Creator? On this point we are in doubt, and both St. Thomas and Aristotle seem to leave the matter in a most perplexing obscurity.[75]

In another place Brownson said "we do not forget the *intellectus agens* of St. Thomas, but it is not quite certain what he meant by it."[76] From the quotations given above it would seem that Brownson would have been more accurate had he said that *he* was not quite certain what St. Thomas meant by the *intellectus agens.*

It might be legitimately inferred, from what has been said up to this point, that Brownson's thought is tending towards exaggerated

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[73] *Ibid.,* 447.
[74] *Ibid.,* 449.
[75] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 512.
[76] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 388.

realism. This can definitely be established by a consideration of Brownson's stand on the important problem of universals. He maintained that a real existence must be attributed to genera and species and on this point he was both consistent and adamant. He rejected the notion that man is a species of the genus animal and claimed for the genus humanity "a real existence and in some sort an existence independent of individuals, though never actually separable from individuals."[77] "Genera and species are, no doubt, very real,"[78] and "genera and species are not abstractions; they are real, though subsisting never apart from individuals";[79] finally, if genera and species are considered as abstractions then "they are nullities as Rosceline held."[80] In so far as Brownson could see, there is no "essential difference between the conceptualism of Abelard and the nominalism of Rosceline; for, by denying the existence *in re* of genera and species, and making them only conceptions, it recognizes as really existing only individuals or particulars."[81] Once more, taking his cue from Father Hill's exposition of the distinction between the direct and reflex universal,[82] Brownson protested that if reflex universals are formed by the mind then they are "abstractions," "creatures of reflection," and therefore "unreal, simple nullities." Then with a note of triumph he adds, "Does not this bear out our charge that Father Hill in his philosophy is a conceptualist if not a nominalist?"[83] In his commentary on this same work of Father Hill, Brownson seems to profess some sort of exaggerated realism:

> Genera and species Cousin has well shown in his *Philosophie Scholastique,* or introduction to the unpublished works of Abelard, the least known of all his philosophical works, are not mere words, as Rosceline maintained, nor conceptions or abstractions, as Abelard taught,

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[77] "Origin and Ground of Government" (1843), *Works,* XIV, 357.
[78] "An A Priori Autobiography" (1850), *Works,* I, 219.
[79] "An Old Quarrel" (1867), *Works,* II, 292.
[80] *Ibid.,* 293.
[81] *Ibid.,* 287.
[82] See W. H. Hill, *Elements of Philosophy* (Baltimore: J. Murphy and Company, 1873), p. 20.
[83] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 510.

> nor separate entities, as they said then, as Guillaume de Champeaux was said, probably falsely said, to hold; but real, distinct, though not separable from individuals, which we hold to be the true doctrine and substantially that of Guillaume de Champeaux and the old Realists.[84]

One of the arguments adduced by Brownson to prove the real existence of genera and species seems to rest on a confusion between species used as a predicable in logic and species used in the natural sciences. This is evident from the use he makes of the text: "And God said, let the earth bring forth the green herb, and such as may see, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its *kind,* which may have seed in itself upon earth," whence Brownson concludes that genera and species are creatures.[85] In the same vein of thought he argues that if the reality of genera and species is denied then the doctrine of original sin, the Redemption, and the Atonement remain inexplicable.[86] He was not sure what St. Thomas taught about genera and species.[87] However he does make this observation:

> Saint Thomas teaches that universals exist *in conceptu* or *in mente cum fundamento in re;* which is true of abstractions, such as whiteness, redness, roundness, hardness, etc., but it is not true of *genera* and *species,* which are terms not of the second but of the first intention, to adopt the terminology of Professor Hill.[88]

It can be inferred from this last quotation that Brownson failed to grasp the fundamental principle which distinguishes the predicables: genera, species, etc., from the predicaments: substance and the nine accidents. In logic the predicaments are deduced *ex diverso modo praedicandi,* and in metaphysics they are deduced *ex conceptu entis.*[89]

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[84] *Ibid.,* 493.

[85] See "An Old Quarrel" (1867), *Works,* II, 292.

[86] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 55. See "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 493.

[87] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 55.

[88] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 510.

[89] See J. Gredt, *Elementa philosophiae aristotelico-thomisticae* (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Herder and Co., 1937), II, 120.

Another point about which Brownson was much concerned was the nature of first principles. Because this plays a very significant role in Brownson's approach to the problem of God detailed attention will be given to it in the next chapter. Here the subject is treated merely to indicate another instance of where Brownson and the scholastics differed. Brownson was keen enough to see that the Kantian "synthetic a priori" ideas destroyed the objectivity of knowledge and led to subjectivism. He frequently called these synthetic a priori ideas, "first principles," and was not satisfied with the treatment given them by Aristotle and Saint Thomas. These first principles according to the mind of St. Thomas, he said, "are inherent in the human reason, constitutive of it."[90] "But what does he [St. Thomas] mean by their insertion in human nature?" And the answer Brownson gives follows his usual manner of interpreting St. Thomas, "We do not know; but, whatever he meant, he must have meant that they were given to man in his creation by his Creator."[91] According to Brownson St. Thomas never tells us:

> Clearly, distinctly, decisively, what he understands by them [first principles] nor how or whence the mind gets possession of them. This—we say it with all reverence for the Holy Doctor—strikes us as a grave defect in his philosophy, a defect which seems to us to omit the primary problem of science and to leave it not unsolved, but even unraised.[92]

In the *De veritate,* St. Thomas observes that anyone wishing to be instructed ought in the beginning believe his master for he will never come to perfect knowledge if he does not suppose as true doctrines that are proposed to him and for which he cannot at the moment uncover the justification.[93] Brownson proposed a

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[90] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 499.

[91] *Ibid.,* 502.

[92] "Ontologism and Psychologism" (1874), *Works,* II, 475.

[93] See *De ver.,* q. 14, a. 10: Et ideo dicitur, quod oportet addiscentem credere: et aliter ad perfectam scientiam prevenire non posset, nisi scilicet supponeret ea quae sibi in principio traduntur, quorum rationes tunc capere non potest.

different method of procedure and one which contradicts the accepted adage, "Saint Thomas is the best interpreter of himself":

> It has often struck us that, to understand or to grasp the meaning of St. Thomas, or any other great mediaeval philosopher, it is necessary to arrive at it, in some sense *aliunde* by original and independent investigation for one's self; or that, in order to understand his solution of a problem, we must first solve it for ourselves. . . .[94]

In Brownson's case the result of such a procedure usually was the distortion of St. Thomas and, in many respects, absurd appraisals and untenable propositions. For example:

> No small portion of scholastic philosophy is an idle waste of thought, the consequence of adopting a false or erroneous point of departure, and serves only to perplex and mislead the student,—to conceal or obscure instead of disclosing and illustrating the truth.[95]

Or again, to rank, as Brownson did, Gioberti, all of whose works are on the *Index,* as the peer of St. Augustine or St. Thomas seems at least *male sonans:*

> Aristotle was a great master of reason, but, as we judge, inferior to Plato, and both he and Plato, were inferior to St. Augustine or St. Thomas. We dare also to be known to hold that in intellectual power and philosophical genius and attainments, the Abbate Gioberti may rank as the peer of any one of the four.[96]

Brownson's failure to master certain fundamental tenets of what is now commonly called the *philosophia perennis* was an important element in determining his approach to the problem of God. This fact, while it renders his rejection of scholasticism intelligible, also makes it suspect. Attention will now be given to what he considered the proper setting of the problem of God.

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[94] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 487.
[95] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 409.
[96] "Faith and Theology" (1863), *Works,* VIII, 25.

CHAPTER II

The General Orientation of Brownson's Thought

Brownson was not at all pleased with the philosophers and theologians who professed to follow the great mediaeval masters. He seemed to think that their slavish repetition turned modern official philosophy into a *hortus siccus* and theology into a *caput mortuum,* where each specimen is properly labelled and numbered.[1] As a result, "to be a philosopher," according to their standards, "demands only a good memory, or readiness in reading or deciphering numbers."[2]

On the other hand, while not necessarily agreeing with everything in their writings, Brownson was not so hard on those thinkers who were not neo-scholastics. According to Brownson, Reid, "must be honored, unless we are to except Cardinal Gerdil . . . as the most genuine philosopher of the eighteenth century."[3] As a matter of fact, Reid's philosophy seems incapable of refuting the agnosticism and scepticism against which it is a reaction.[4] Moreover, if, as Brownson wishes, "we except Gerdil" then the greatest philosopher of the eighteenth century is a man who is an ontologist.[5] Brownson praised Malebranche for reviving, in his theory of Vision in God, ". . . a great truth which the prevalence of peripateticism has caused to be well-nigh forgotten."[6] It is difficult to see how Brownson could find so much enthusiasm for Malebranche, who was a Cartesian,[7] and so little for Descartes whom he considered unworthy "to be named among the philoso-

[1] See "Philosophy of Revelation" (1861), *Works,* II, 184.

[2] See *ibid., loc. cit.*

[3] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 248.

[4] See P. Geny, *Brevis conspectus historiae philosophiae* (Rome: Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, 1943), 5th ed., p. 283.

[5] See A. Lepidi, *Examen philosophico-theologicum de ontologismo* (Louvain: C. J. Fonteyn, 1864), p. 245.

[6] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 410.

[7] See E. Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 186.

phers."[8] In Brownson's estimation Père Hugonin "ranks among the very first living philosophers of his country."[9] Yet, before elevating Hugonin to the episcopacy, the Holy See demanded from him a formal repudiation of his philosophy.[10] Brownson accredited Hume with having "settled it forever that the judgment of causality cannot be obtained from sensible experience."[11] In Brownson's opinion it was necessary for anyone ". . . who would write or talk on philosophy in our day to thoroughly master Kant."[12] But he reserved his supreme encomium for Gioberti, for, according to Brownson, until Gioberti appeared on the scene, "philosophy was not and could not be a science."[13] Yet all the works of Gioberti were put on the Index.[14]

This last paragraph must not be construed to mean that those thinkers whom Brownson praised were in any way his masters. Such an interpretation would be repugnant to the independence he so jealously guarded. But it does seem to reveal a certain predilection, otherwise he would be guilty of a purely arbitrary eclecticism. However, rather than give a comparative study of Brownson and the men he read, attention will be focused on two aspects of his thought which determined, to a large extent, his approach to the problem of God and, at the same time differentiate it from the traditional approach incorporated in the *quinque viae*.

Brownson defined philosophy as the "science of principles."[15] Unfortunately, in so doing, he did not intend to give "a strictly scientific definition, brief, exact, precise, and adequate."[16] But the point at issue here is not his definition of philosophy but his con-

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[8] "Dignity of Human Reason" (1875), *Works,* I, 440.
[9] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 408.
[10] See A. Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. 318.
[11] "The Problem of Causality" (1855), *Works,* I, 402.
[12] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 508.
[13] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1869), *Works,* I, 418.
[14] Decr. 30 Maii 1849; S. Off. 14 Jan. 1852.
[15] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 41; "Ontologism and Psychologism" (1874), *Works,* II, 480; "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 495.
[16] "Ontologism and Psychologism" (1874), *Works,* II, 480.

cept of the nature and origin of principles. Brownson himself clearly understood the significance of this question:

> In order to refute atheism and to check the atheistic tendency of modern society, it is necessary to revise the generally received philosophy, to correct its faulty principles and method, to supply its defects, to harmonize it with common sense and the traditions of the race, and to establish, what it is far from doing, the identity of the principles of science and the principles of things, or the identity of the knowable and the real, that is to show that the order of science follows the order of being, and in their principles they are identical.[17]

Nothing could be more obvious than that Brownson's concern was with the nature of first principles and their origin. What did he understand by the complex term "first principles"? Negatively, first principles are not ". . . subjective reason, nor its processes or modes of activity . . .";[18] nor are they "abstract ideas";[19] nor are they the abstract form of the principle of contradiction, identity, or causality.[20] Positively, first principles are "necessary and eternal truths";[21] "principles of all science";[22] "first principles of rational truth";[23] "axioms";[24] "primitive data of the mind";[25] "first principles of the intelligence";[26] finally and significantly, they are ". . . *a priori* principles, or, as Kant calls them, cognitions or synthetic judgments *a priori*,—judgments which precede reasoning."[27]

The question of the origin of first principles plays an important role in the development of Brownson's thought. Modern philosophy in his opinion grievously erred in treating the question of

[17] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 480.
[18] "Gratry's Logic" (1856), *Works,* I, 374.
[19] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 395.
[20] See *ibid.,* 398.
[21] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 505.
[22] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 233.
[23] "Gratry on the Knowledge of God" (1855), *Works,* I, 329.
[24] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 261.
[25] "Ontologism and Psychologism" (1874), *Works,* II, 474.
[26] *Ibid., loc. cit.*
[27] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 523.

method before the question of principles because "method does not give principles, for every method presupposes them."[28] According to Brownson, the methods or processes of reason are given in reasoning itself, and are ". . . always followed by everyone who reasons, by the unlettered peasant, or simple rustic, as faithfully and as rigidly as by St. Thomas or a St. Augustine."[29] (It might be remarked here that the simple rustic enjoys essentially the same equipment, entitatively considered, as St. Thomas or St. Augustine but it is surely absurd to say that the effect of reasoning, i.e., *scientia,* in the Aristotelian sense of the word, is the same in all three. This applies, as St. Thomas observes, especially to the understanding of first principles.)[30]

The refrain "principles precede method" occurs over and over again in Brownson's writings.[31] Moreover, he holds that principles not only precede method but that they also precede reasoning:

> There is no reasoning except from premises or principles, and no valid reasoning from either false or unknown principles. How are these premises or principles to be obtained? Not by reasoning, not by a logical process, for without them, no reasoning, no logical process is possible, and no such thing as proof or demonstration conceivable. They must then precede reasoning, be intuitive, evident of themselves.[32]

No man "can be really so mad as to affirm that the human mind supplies the principles of things, or even of reasoning, for it cannot operate without them."[33] Moreover, principles cannot be found or obtained by the exercise of our faculties;[34] nor by our own activity;[35] nor are they "found, obtained, or created by the mind's

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[28] "Gratry's Logic (1856), *Works,* I, 374.

[29] *Ibid., loc. cit.*

[30] See *Sum. theol.,* II-II, q. 5, a. 4, ad 3.

[31] "Victor Cousin and His Philosophy" (1867), *Works,* II, 324; See "The Cartesian Doubt" (1867), *Works,* II, 362; also "Professor Bascom's Lectures" (1873), *Works,* II, 499.

[32] "The Convert" (1857), *Works,* V, 136.

[33] "Dignity of Human Reason" (1857), *Works,* I, 452.

[34] See "Victor Cousin and His Philosophy" (1867), *Works,* II, 321.

[35] See *ibid.,* 323.

own activity."[36] They cannot be "formed by the mind operating on the concrete objects of existence, nor in any manner obtained by our own mental activity; for without them there is no mind, no mental activity, no experience."[37]

How then does the mind obtain these first principles? Having eliminated what he considered every possible manner in which the mind could conceivably obtain them by its own activity, Brownson turned to the only source left, God, "As reason cannot operate without principles, or furnish its own principles, God himself supplies them in the natural order by his immediate presence in reason as its creator, its light, and its object. . . ."[38] Principles, then, are given, not found, nor demonstrated:

> Demonstration does not affirm its principles, for it always proceeds from them as already known, or assumed to be known. The mind cannot act, or even exist without principles. It does not without principles go forth weeping and wailing, like the poor Isis, in search of principles, for till it has principles, it cannot act, cannot even exist, for the principles are the very elements of its life. All the principles essential to its existence as intelligent existence must be given to it in the very first instant of its creation, for without them there is not only no thought, no intelligent act, but no intelligence, no mind to think or perceive.[39]

Brownson was as insistent in affirming that principles must be given as he was in affirming that they must precede method. The mind "destitute of principles, cannot seek principles, and ignorant of them it cannot recognize them, or know them to be principles," consequently, they ". . . must be given antecedently to all our mental operation."[40]

But principles must be received as well as given, for there is and can be no act of human science without the human subject; "in all human science it is the human subject that knows, and hence

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[36] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 417.
[37] *Ibid.,* 395.
[38] "Necessity of Divine Revelation" (1857), *Works,* I, 486.
[39] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 430.
[40] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 233.

all human science is subjective as well as objective."[41] Thus with a single stroke Brownson demolished the illusory *pons asinorum* of the philosophers; at least he did provided his own solution is not itself an illusion. Principles are given ". . . in the very constitution of the mind, and are present to it from its birth, or, if you will, from the first instant of its conception; but they are by no means what Descartes and others have called innate ideas."[42] For, once more, "the mind must be in possession of principles, before it is capable of any operation to obtain them, or by which they are obtained."[43] After many repetitions of this nature he gave, in 1875, what might be considered his definitive opinion:

> We think we have here stated the question so clearly and distinctly, that even our modern peripatetics, however wedded to routine, or blinded by prejudice, cannot misapprehend it. The question, then, turns on the necessity to the fact of knowledge, intuitive or discursive, of *a priori* principles, or, as Kant calls them, cognitions or synthetic judgments *a priori,*—judgments which precede experience, and which are not and cannot be furnished or obtained by the action of the subject, because, as we hold, the subject cannot act without them. They are given by the object in affirming itself by its own activity, in which the subject has no more lot or part than it has in the divine creative act which calls it from nothing into existence. The object is *ens necessarium et reale,* real and necessary being; and it is its creative act that gives the mind, as we have so often explained, the principles of science, which are at the same time the principles of all the knowable and the real.[44]

Brownson now has only one problem to settle. How does the mind know these principles and what are they? In spite of the fact that he has been insisting that principles precede method and the mind cannot attain them by its own unaided efforts, he paradoxically lays down both a method and a principle, the application

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[41] "The Philosophy of Revelation" (1861), *Works,* II, 149.
[42] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 402.
[43] "Professor Bascom's Lectures" (1873), *Works,* II, 499.
[44] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 523.

of which will determine what these first principles are and how they are attained:

> . . . The order of the real and the knowable is the same, and the principles of the real are the principles of science. The soul is an intelligent existence, and the principles, causes, and conditions of her existence are the principles, causes, and conditions of her intelligence, and therefore of her actual knowledge. We have, then, only to ascertain the principles of the real to determine the principles of science.[45]

The principle, as Brownson lays it down, seems to identify logic and ontology, as a matter of fact he had expressly said, ". . . the *primum logicum* must be coincident with the first principle of things,"[46] and logic is ". . . the order of things, not merely the order of conception."[47] In his exposition of Gioberti's philosophy he points out that for Gioberti, ". . . God is the first principle in science and in being."[48] In this one instance, because Brownson is only indicating Gioberti's thought, it cannot be claimed that he accepted it, but it cannot be claimed that he rejected it either.

Now what is the result of the application of this method? What are the principles of the real and of science? Brownson, himself, answered these questions from a scriptural, theological, and philosophical point of view:

> The principles of the real are given us in the first verse of Genesis: "in the beginning God created heaven and earth," and in the first article of the creed, "I believe in one God, maker of heaven and earth, and all things visible and invisible." Or, as stated in strictly scientific terms, as affirmed in intuition, Being creates existences. . . . The first principles of reality are being, existence, and the creative act of being, whence the ideal formula or judgment, Being creates existences.[49]

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[45] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 393.
[46] "Gratry's Logic" (1856), *Works,* I, 375.
[47] *Ibid., loc. cit.*
[48] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 252.
[49] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 393.

It would be difficult to find a more fundamental point of disagreement between Brownson and the scholastics than the question of first principles. His position is the very antithesis of theirs. For Brownson the mind is unable to come to a knowledge of first principles by its own activity; for the scholastics it is precisely the ontological and transcendental validity of our natural knowledge of first principles that furnishes the mind with the means of demonstrating the existence of God. This validity has been cogently defended, in recent years, by the eminent Dominican theologian, Father Garrigou-Lagrange.[50] It is problematical whether such a treatment of first principles would have satisfied Brownson. He would be reluctant to admit even the generic definition of principle given by Saint Thomas.[51] Because, according to Brownson, such definitions, like the principle of contradiction, identity, and causality are "abstractions and therefore not real,"[52] and "truths and principles are never abstract."[53] Moreover, Brownson was familiar with the traditional treatment of first principles in the works of such neo-scholastics as, Stöckl, Kleutgen, Liberatore, Tongiorgi, and, for the most part, he found them, ". . . superficial, vague, uncertain, and far better suited to perplex than to satisfy the student."[54] He maintained that they started, ". . . from a point below principles" and, consequently their philosophy, "deals at best with abstract forms or concepts," and is therefore, "formal, not real without any solid basis, as unsubstantial as the baseless fabric of a vision."[55] Nor did he find the great thinkers of the Middle Ages any help. The scholastics, as far as Brownson was aware, hardly raise the question,[56] and Saint Thomas never tells us clearly, distinctly,

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[50] See R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Dieu son existence et sa nature* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et Ses Fils, 1933), 6th ed., pp. 107-216.

[51] See *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 33, a. 1: "Dicendum quod hoc nomen principium nihil aliud significat quam id a quo aliquid procedit: omne enim a quo aliquid procedit quocumque modo dicimus esse principium. . . ."

[52] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 398.

[53] *Ibid.*, 395.

[54] "Ontologism and Psychologism" (1874), *Works,* II, 473.

[55] *Ibid.*, 474.

[56] See *ibid.*, 475.

decisively, what he understands by first principles or how the mind gets in possession of them, and therefore he leaves the primary problem of science, "not only unsolved but also not even raised."[57] Nor does it seem as though Brownson would admit the distinction between the principles of cognition and the principles of things because, in his thought, the *Primum Logicum* must be coincident with the first principles of things,[58] and God is the first principle in being and knowing.[59]

In spite of this radical divergence between Brownson and the scholastics on the question of first principles, there is a common ground on which they may meet and that is his analysis of thought. If that is valid then his exposition of the origin of first principles is difficult to assail. According to Brownson, every philosopher must begin the construction of his philosophy with an analysis of thought.[60] Hence his point of departure is the *cogito* of Descartes.[61] If asked, in the words of Maritain, "how can a philosophy which starts only from thought, and according to which the mind attains at first only to itself, be sure that all the objects of thought are not beings of reason?"[62] Brownson would answer, "the error of Descartes, or the Psychologues, is not in beginning in thought but in their assumption that all thought is a purely psychological fact."[63]

The problem of Cartesian Idealism was not how to get into the mind but how to get out of the mind. Adopting the same point of departure, and by "a diligent and careful analysis of thought,"[64] Brownson believed he had achieved what all idealists before him had failed to do, i.e., establish the objective validity of thought.

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[57] *Ibid.*, 475.

[58] See "Gratry's Logic" (1856), *Works,* I, 375.

[59] See "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 252.

[60] See "Victor Cousin and His Philosophy" (1867), *Works,* II, 310; also "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 495.

[61] See "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 41.

[62] Jacques Maritain, *Les degrés du savoir* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer Cie, 1932), p. 260: "Mais pour une philosophie qui ne part que de la pensée, et selon laquelle la pensée n'atteint d'abord qu'elle-même, comment être sur que tous nos objects de pensée ne sont pas des êtres de raison?"

[63] Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 42.

[64] *Ibid.*, 41.

His first step was borrowed from the eclectic, Cousin, who, according to Brownson:

> . . . gives somewhere a very clear and just analysis of thought, which he defines to be a complex fact, composed of three inseparable elements, subject, object, and form. He asserts that the subject is always the soul, or ourselves thinking; the object is always distinct from the soul, and standing over against it; and the form is always the relation of the subject and object. Every thought, therefore, is the synthesis of three elements: subject, object, and their relation, as we maintained and proved in some chapters of an unfinished work on Synthetic Philosophy published in the years 1842-'43.[65]

Anyone attempting to show a progressive development in the essential elements of Brownson's thought must reckon with the admission contained in this passage. The first step in Brownson's analysis of thought, which in turn is the first step in his proof of the existence of God, he maintained he had demonstrated thirty-one years before he composed his famous, "Essay in Refutation of Atheism,"[66] and, at least, one year before his conversion. Nor can this be dismissed as a mere *obiter dictum* for it appears in an article which represents Brownson's mature and considered opinion on the subject.[67] Moreover, thirteen years after his conversion he wrote his autobiography to explain to his former non-Catholic following why he temporarily suppressed what had been regarded as his own philosophical theory:

> . . . till I had time to review my past writings in the light of my new faith, the matter was uncertain, and it was my duty, so far as the public was concerned, to let the doctrine sleep, and to write and publish nothing but what I had a warrant for in the approved writers of the church. I acted prudently, as it was proper I should act, and I should continue to do so still, and not have written the present book [The Convert] and taken up the con-

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[65] *Ibid.*, 42. The unfinished work, *Synthetic Philosophy*, to which Brownson has reference in this quotation is found in *Works*, I, 58-129.

[66] See *ibid.*, 42.

[67] See *ibid.*, p. VIII.

> necting link, had not nearly thirteen years of Catholic experience and study enabled me to perceive that the doctrine of life I asserted is in no way incompatible with any Catholic principle or doctrine I have become acquainted with, and that it did legitimately lead me to the Catholic Church.[68]

Now, Brownson's analysis of thought is merely an application of his doctrine of life as he, himself, indicates in his *Synthetic Philosophy*.[69] In view of these facts Theodore Maynard's conclusion that "with regard to the metaphysical theories he [Brownson] first began to propound in 1850 he would never budge,"[70] needs to be pushed back to 1842, the year in which he wrote his unfinished *Synthetic Philosophy*.

Immediately after *defining* thought as "a complex fact, composed of three inseparable elements, subject, object, and form," Brownson divides it as follows:

> Thought is either intuitive or reflective. The careful analysis of intuitive thought, intuition, . . . discloses these three elements: subject, object, and their relation, always distinct, always inseparable, given simultaneously in one and the same complex fact. Deny one or another of these elements and there is or can be no thought. Remove the subject, and there is no thought, for, there evidently can be no thought where there is no thinker; remove the object, and there is equally no thought, for to think nothing is simply not to think; and finally, deny the relation of subject and object, and you also deny all thought, for certainly the soul cannot apprehend an object or an object be presented to the soul with no relation between them. . . .[71]

It is true, as Brownson indicates, that the analysis of thought reveals three elements; subject, object and their relation. But is the mere statement of this fact sufficient to establish the objectiv-

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[68] "The Convert" (1857), *Works,* V, 168.

[69] See "Synthetic Philosophy" (1843), *Works,* I, 64.

[70] T. Maynard, *Orestes Brownson* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 274.

[71] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 42.

ity of knowledge? Brownson seemed to think so, for without examining the nature or function of anyone of these three elements, he merely states that to deny anyone of them is to deny the existence of thought and concludes therefore that they are all objectively real:

> The three elements of thought being given simultaneously and synthetically in one and the same fact, [the fact of thought] they all three rest on the same authority and are equally certain both subjectively and objectively. Here we escape the interminable debates of philosophers as to the passage from the subjective to the objective, and in military phrase, flank the question of the certainty of human knowledge, and thus render all arguments against either subjectivism or scepticism superfluous.[72]

> Philosophers long disputed about the passage from the subjective to the objective, and from the objective to the subjective. It is now seen that there is no passage from the one to the other, and that none is needed, because one is never given in thought without the other, but both are given simultaneously, though distinctly.[73]

> Philosophy has never yet discovered a passage from the subjective to the objective. Both must be given simultaneously, in one and the same intuition, or neither can be asserted.[74]

> How prove that in any fact of knowledge there is cognition of an object that exists distinct from and independent of the subject? Here is the *pons asinorum* of exclusive psychologists. There is no crossing the bridge from the subjective to the objective, for there is no bridge there, and subject and object must both be given simultaneously in one and the same act, or neither is given.[75]

> The fact then that man thinks at all, since he can think himself only as mirrored in the object, establishes at once

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[72] *Ibid.*, 43.

[73] "Gratry on the Knowledge of God" (1855), *Works,* I, 349.

[74] "The Convert" (1875), *Works,* V, 153.

[75] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 391.

a real objective world, and avoids the passage from the subjective to the objective, the *pons asinorum* of nearly all modern as of many ancient philosophers, for both are given distinctly and simultaneously in every mental operation.[76]

There is no logic by which the objective can be concluded from the subjective, as the interminable and always unsatisfactory discussions of psychologists on the question of certainty, or the validity of our subjective ideas or concepts, amply prove. There is no bridge over which the mind can pass from the subjective to the objective.[77]

The real solution of the problem is in the fact that there is and can be no purely subjective thought, for the soul being finite and dependent, as we have said, cannot be its own object, and in every thought the objective is presented simultaneously with the subjective, and both are given in one and the same complex fact, both rest on the same authority, and are equally certain; and philosophers may talk till doomsday, but this is all there is to be said.[78]

But the first intention being only an act, a direct and immediate act, if you will, of the mind, gives only a concept; and the author [Father Hill] concedes it, when he says the mind in its reflex act, or act of the second intention, forms *another* concept: which plainly implies that the object affirmed in the first intention is a concept. It will be no answer to this to say that, though the object of the term is a concept, the object of the mental act is a real object existing out of the mind and independent of it; for, if the term stands for a concept, and not for the real object, it is inappropriate and false. Moreover, if the term expresses a concept only, and not the real object, we have our old difficulty. How know that there is a real object out of the mind, of which the term expresses the concept, and which responds to it? The direct act of the mind is never, taken by itself, any thing but a concept, and every concept is subjective. How pass from it

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[76] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 258.
[77] "Professor Bascom's Lectures" (1873), *Works,* II, 450.
[78] *Ibid.,* 458.

> to the objective, or prove that in the concept, or idea, any object but the idea or concept, which is in the mind, is apprehended?[79]

It is hard to see how Brownson's definition of thought as "a complex fact, composed of three inseparable elements; subject, object, and form," is sufficient to solve once and for all the epistemological problem of the objective validity of thought. From the quotations given, and from what has been said in the first chapter about Brownson's appraisal of the scholastic theory of cognition, it is clear that he presumes the object is found *in mente* as it exists *in re*:

> Reid dispelled, forever, the Peripatetic phantasms, and proved that in sensibles we perceive the things themselves, not their images, phantasms, or immaterial representatives. Malebranche, after Plato and St. Augustine and others, had previously done the same thing in regard to the non-sensible world.[80]

He attributes to the object of intellectual cognition that which is proper only to sensible cognition:

> It is not the *intellectus agens* that renders the intelligible intelligible *in actu,* as the Scholastics teach, but the intelligible is itself by its own light intelligible *in actu,* and it is the concurrence of its intelligibility *in actu* with our own intellective faculty that forms the intuition.[81]

Until he establishes the validity of these positions it would seem that the strategy Brownson describes, in a military phrase, as "flanking the question," becomes in a philosophical phrase a *petitio principii.*

Assuming that the mere enumeration of the three elements found in thought is sufficient to establish the objective validity of thought, Brownson proceeds immediately to the analysis of the object of thought:

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[79] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 510-11.
[80] "Dignity of Human Reason" (1867), *Works,* I, 449.
[81] "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 304.

> The analysis of thought, . . . discloses a non-psychical or an ontological element, and shows that in every thought there is an object distinct from and independent of the subject, and that in every intuitive thought the object affirms or presents itself by its own activity. This at one stroke establishes the reality of the object and the validity of our science or knowledge. Having done this, we may proceed to analyze, not the subject, as do the psychologists, but the object, in order to determine, not how we know, but what we know.[82]

This he does on the principle that "the analysis of the object is the necessary condition of the analysis of the subject."[83] But here it seems he missed an important distinction in regard to the specification of faculties. From his own principle it is obvious that he is not concerned with the intrinsic specification of the faculty of knowing but rather with the extrinsic specification of the faculty. But, even in this last case it must be borne in mind that faculties are specified by acts and by objects to which they are ordained, *immediately* by acts and only *mediately* by objects.[84]

Brownson's definition of thought and his analysis of the object before the subject completely ignores the nature of the act of cognition. This would seem to be a grave weakness in his system. It is hardly consonant with his doctrine of life. According to Brownson philosophy was "the science of life,"[85] and thought a "fact of life."[86] Obviously, then, he ought to have interpreted the act of cognition in terms of life. This is precisely what he failed to do, and where he failed Saint Thomas succeeded. In many illuminating passages the Angelic Doctor pointed out that activity which is a sign of life is twofold; transitive and immanent.[87] In transitive action the term is always outside the agent; in immanent

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[82] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), II, 46.

[83] *Ibid.*, 47.

[84] J. Gredt, *Elementa philosophiae aristotelico-thomisticae* (Friburgi Brisgoviae; Herder and Co., 1937), 7th ed., I, 337.

[85] "Synthetic Philosophy" (1843), *Works,* I, 56.

[86] *Ibid.*, 67.

[87] See *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 14, a. 2; I, q. 18, a. 3 ad 1; II-II, q. 178, a. 1; C. gent., I, 97.

action the term is always within the agent. In the first instance, the agent acts for the perfection of a thing distinct from itself; in the second instance, the agent acts for its own perfection. Moreover, beings possess life only in proportion to their immanent activity and "the more immanent the activity the higher the life."[88] Then, in the rest of this magnificent passage, Saint Thomas applies this pregnant principle to the whole hierarchy of animate objects. Ascending from a consideration of the degree of life possessed by plants, animals, and men, Saint Thomas comes to this conclusion, which is the only one consonant with Brownson's contention that thought is a fact of life, that "the supreme and perfect degree of life is that which is according to the intellect; for the intellect reflects on itself and is able to know itself."[89] With inexorable logic Saint Thomas never forgets that thought is a vital process.[90] The act of intelligence remains in the intellect itself.[91] It is not an action passing to something extrinsic to itself.[92] The term of the intellectual act is the object itself possessed intentionally by the mind.[93] Moreover, it is due precisely to this immanent possession of the object that the soul

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[88] *C. gent.*, IV, 11: ". . . quanto aliqua natura est altior, tanto id quod ex ea emanat, magis ei est intimum."

[89] *Ibid.*: "Est igitur supremus et perfectus gradus vitae qui est secundum intellectum; nam intellectus in seipsum reflectitur, et seipsum intelligere potest."

[90] *In XII met.*, lect. 8: ". . . actus intellectus, id est intelligere, vita quaedam est, et est perfectissimum quod est in vita."

[91] *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 14, a. 4: ". . . intelligere non est actio progrediens ad aliquid extrinsecum, sed manet in operante sicut actus et perfectio eius. . . ."

[92] *De ver.*, q. 10, a. 9. ad 7: ". . . motus vel operatio cognitivae partis, perficitur in ipsa mente. . . ."

[93] *C. gent.*, I, 53: ". . . considerandum est quod res exterior intellecta a nobis in intellectu nostro non existit secundum propriam naturam, sed oportet quod species eius sit in intellectu nostro, per quam fit intellectus in actu. Existens autem in actu per huiusmodi speciem sicut per propriam formam, intelligit rem ipsam. Non autem ita quod ipsum intelligere sit actio transiens in intellectum, sicut calefactio transit in calefactum, sed manet in intelligente; et habet relationem ad rem quae intelligitur, ex eo quod species praedicta, quae est principium intellectualis operationis ut forma, est similitudo illius."

can reflect and know itself.[94] The term of the intellectual operation remains in the intellect as its act and as its perfection.[95]

This immanent activity of the intellect is not formally action (predicamental, physical action) but virtually and eminently action (metaphysical action).[96] If it produces a term, *species expressa,* it does so only *per accidens* and for the action itself. In other words, the perfection of the act of knowing is not in the production of a term but in the contemplation of the object. For this reason, the act of cognition pertains to the first species of quality, for it is an accident disposing the faculty of cognition.[97] As a vital operation the act of cognition, in the order of efficient causality, is an effect of the subject knowing. As such it can never be anything but the immanent act of an operative faculty.

It is precisely from this point of view, as a vital operation, that Brownson's definition of thought, "a complex fact, composed of three inseparable elements: subject, object, and their relation," breaks down and is inacceptable. It can scarcely be regarded as an essential definition, for it reveals nothing about the intrinsic nature of the thing defined. It might presumably be considered a genetic definition, describing the origin of thought through the interaction of three elements; subject, object, and their relation. But such a definition fails to meet the exigencies of the situation, for it says nothing about the nature of the vital operation involved. The point Brownson seemed to have missed is that the nature of the synthesis of subject and object in thought must follow the nature of the intellect itself for the very simple but profound reason that *operatio sequitur esse.* For this reason the antithesis of Brownson's position is true. The subject thinking must be analyzed before the object thought in order to determine the nature of the synthesis of subject and object in thought.

If the object is present in thought it can be there only in accordance with the principle, *quod in altero est, est in eo per modum*

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[94] See *supra,* p. 37, n. 89.

[95] *Sum. theol.,* I, q. 57, a. 1, ad I: "Dicendum quod intellectum est perfectio intelligentis secundum speciem intelligibilem quam habet in intellectu."

[96] See J. Gredt, *op. cit.,* I, 476.

[97] *Ibid.,* I, 370. "Actio cognoscitiva ad primam speciem praedicamenti qualitatis pertinet; est enim accidens bene disponens virtutem cognoscitivam."

recipientis.[98] Now the precise difference between knowing and non-knowing beings is that the latter possess only their own forms whereas the former possess also the form of some other thing.[99] In the same article Saint Thomas gives the reason why beings are radically cognitive; "the immateriality of a thing is the reason why it is cognitive and the mode of cognition is according to the mode of immateriality."[100] Brownson would admit with Saint Thomas that cognition takes place when the thing known in is the subject knowing but they differ as to the nature of the object's presence in thought. For Saint Thomas "the thing known is in the subject knowing according to the mode of the subject knowing,"[101] while for Brownson the object is in the mind as it exists *in re*. Saint Thomas, interpreting thought in terms of a vital operation, can account for the presence of the object in thought by reason of the immateriality of the subject thinking, while all Brownson seems to do is assert that the object is found in thought by some sort of mechanical juxtaposition, as it were, "standing over against the subject."[102]

Just as Brownson's definition of thought as "a complex fact, composed of three inseparable elements; subject, object, and form," is insufficient to solve the problem of the objective validity of thought, so is it likewise insufficient to account for the nature of the act of cognition. Brownson's principle that "the analysis of the object is the necessary condition of the analysis of the subject" completely ignores the principles; *operatio sequitur esse,* and *quod in altero est, est in eo per modum recipientis.*

On the basis of his rather superficial definition of thought, Brownson proceeds to divide thought into intuitive thought and reflective thought.[103] His concept of intuition is rather difficult to

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[98] *C. gent.,* I, 43.

[99] *Sum. theol.,* I, q. 14, a. 1: ". . . considerandum est quod cognoscentia a non cognoscentibus in hoc distinguuntur, quia non cognoscentia nihil habent nisi formam suam tantum; sed cognoscens natum est habere formam etiam rei alterius, nam species cogniti est in cognoscente."

[100] *Ibid., loc. cit.,* ". . . immaterialitas alicuius rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitiva; et secundum modum immaterialitatis est modus cognitionis."

[101] *Ibid., loc. cit.,* ad 3: "Scitum enim est in sciente secundum modum scientis."

[102] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 42.

[103] See *ibid.,* 42.

grasp. He distinguishes intuition from reflection and from any spontaneous operation of the mind.[104] Intuition, according to Brownson, "is not our act whether spontaneous or reflective."[105] "It is an act of the object not an act of the subject."[106] It is difficult to see how Brownson could logically divide thought (which presumably is the product of the subject thinking) into an act of the mind (reflective thought) and an act of the object (intuitive thought).

Brownson began his analysis of thought with the simple enumeration of its three component elements; subject, object and their relation. Take away any one of these three and there is no thought. From this simple statement he concludes to the reality of the object. Moreover, according to Brownson the object must present itself by its own activity, "It is the fact that the object actively concurs in the production of thought that establishes its reality, since what is not, or has no real existence, cannot act, cannot present or affirm itself."[107] This presentation, or affirmation of the object to thought, is what Brownson calls intuition. He feels under no constraint to make the object conform in any way to the nature and conditions of the subject thinking and presumes that the intellect comes into immediate contact with the object as it exists outside the mind with no intermediary necessary. It was on the basis of this assumption that he advised the Scholastics to dismiss their "vexations, phantasms and the intelligible species." He continued:

> And understanding that we stand face to face with reality, whether corporeal or incorporeal, spiritual or material, intelligible or sensible, with nothing but the intelligible light of God between as the medium of both intelligible and sensible intuition, they might easily find themselves in accord with the Catholic ontologists, and their philosophy corresponding to the order of things.[108]

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[104] See *ibid.*, 43.
[105] "The Church Review and Victor Cousin" (1868), *Works,* II, 355.
[106] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 56.
[107] *Ibid.*, 44.
[108] "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 290.

From a psychological point of view Brownson's analysis of thought puts the cart before the horse by insisting that the analysis of the object is the necessary condition for the analysis of the subject. The whole process denies the abstractive character of the human intellect and gratuitously assumes that the object exists in the mind as it does in reality.

If Brownson had given due attention to the analysis of what he calls "the subject thinking" perhaps he would not have been so terrified by the bogey of abstractions. While it is true that there are "no abstractions in nature,"[109] it does not follow, as Brownson seemed to think, that there is not an abstractive faculty which is natural to man. Man is the only intellectual being with a body. Human intelligence requires a body not because the body is the organism by which the intellect functions, but because it operates on material things.[110] Strictly speaking man is not an intellectual being but a rational being. Rationality is a quality proper to the animal genus and is not to be attributed to either God or angels.[111] The divine and angelic intelligence are free from matter, but the human intellect, united as it is to an animal organism, must operate on matter. It is therefore natural for it to use phantasms.[112] Although Saint Thomas distinguishes *intellectus* and *ratio*,[113] still he maintains that they both belong to the same faculty[114] and he at-

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[109] "An A Priori Autobiography" (1850), *Works*, I, 250.

[110] *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 3: "Dicendum quod corpus requiritur ad actionem intellectus non sicut organum quo talis actio exerceatur, sed ratione obiecti; phantasma enim comparatur ad intellectum sicut color ad visum."

[111] *In I sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4: "Rationale est differentia animalis et Deo non convenit nec angelis."

[112] *De spir. creat.*, q. 1, a. 2, ad 7: "Et similiter naturale est animae quod indigeat phantasmatibus ad intelligendum; eo quod tamen sequitur quod diminuatur in intelligendo a substantiis superioribus."

[113] *Sum. theol.*, II-II, q. 49, a. 5, ad 3: "Dicendum quod etsi intellectus et ratio non sint diversae potentiae, tamen denominantur ex diversis actibus; intellectus enim nomen sumitur ab intima penetratione veritatis; nomen autem rationis ab inquisitione et discursu."

[114] *De ver.*, q. 15, a. 1: "Actus autem rationis, qui est discurrere, et intellectus, qui est simpliciter apprehendere veritatem, comparantur ad invicem ut generatio ad esse, et motus ad quietem. In idem autem principium reducitur quiescere et moveri in omnibus in quibus utrique inveniuntur; quia per quam naturam aliquid quiescit in loco, per eamdem movetur ad locum; sed se

tributes to the intellect the power of knowing immediately in one act of simple apprehension, i.e., by a simple intuition.[115]

This analysis of the nature of the human intellect furnishes an adequate solution to the difficulty raised by Brownson's purely gratuitous distinction between intuition as an "act of the object" and intuition as an "act of the subject." Abstraction and intuition are not contradictory. Saint Thomas opposes intuition not to abstraction but to the discursive process of reasoning. Abstraction is a process whereby an object is rendered intelligible, a suitable object for the human intellect; whereas reasoning is a process whereby the mind proceeds from the known to the unknown. Abstraction is direct, immediate, and takes place without reasoning. Reasoning, on the contrary, is always mediate. The Angelic Doctor stresses the directness of intuition. For example, he speaks of its logical directness, meaning that intuition gives indemonstrable or *per se nota* knowledge;[116] and of its psychological directness, meaning that it is immediate.[117] Now, it is precisely because Brownson distinguished intuition from reflection, and made abstraction pertain to reflection that he failed to see that the function of the species in the process of cognition is the key to the problem of the relation of abstraction to intuition. Saint Thomas insists that the intelligible species is not *that which* is known but *that by which* the object is known. The intellect knows *things* directly, the *id quod;* not their representatives, the *id quo.*[118]

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habent quiescens et motum sicut perfectum et imperfectum. Unde et potentia discurrens et veritatem accipiens non erunt diversae, sed una; quae, inquantum est perfecta, veritatem absolute cognoscit; inquantum vero est imperfecta, discursu indiget."

[115] *Ibid., loc. cit*: ". . . sine aliquo motu vel discursu, statim in primo et subito sive simplici acceptione."

[116] *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 11: "aliqua propositio est per se nota de se, quae tamen huic vel illi non est per se nota; quando scilicet praedicatum est de ratione subjecti, et tamen ratio subjecti et alicui ignota; sicut si aliquis nesciret quid est totum, non esset ei nota ista propositio per se, *Omne totus est majus sua parte;* huiusmodi enim propositiones fiunt notae cognitis terminis, . . ."

[117] See *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 12.

[118] *De ver.*, q. 10, a. 4, ad 1: "Objectum intellectus est ipsa essentia rei, quamvis essentiam rei cognoscat per eius similitudinem, sicut per medium cognoscendi"; *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 85, a. 2: ". . . similitudo rei visibilis

As has been indicated, Brownson's point of departure in his philosophical speculation is not the moderate realism of Saint Thomas but the *cogito* of Descartes. From an historical point of view this is an extremely precarious procedure, for, as Gilson observes, "one may begin with Descartes but one cannot help ending with Berkeley or Kant."[119] Moreover, Brownson's contention that every philosopher must begin the construction of his philosophy with an analysis of thought requires considerable qualification. In many respects it seems an undue concession to the primacy of thought which, since Descartes, has usurped the place of the primacy of being in philosophical speculation. Undoubtedly Brownson's concern with the object of knowledge is a commendable attempt to escape the pitfall of Cartesianism. But his cursory treatment of the critical problem is an over-simplification. It is not within the scope of this work to deal *ex professo* with the epistemological problems raised by Brownson's position, but it can be pointed out that the mere statement, the object of thought must be real otherwise there is no thought, is hardly a complete answer to the problem. As Maritain has pointed out:

> The critique of knowledge presupposes a long continued effort to know—knowledge which is not only spontaneous, but scientific—not only scientific (in the modern sense of the word), but philosophical and psychological, logical and metaphysical. It is itself part of

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est secundum quam visus videt; et similitudo rei intellectae, quae est species intelligibilis, est forma secundum quam intellectus intelligit. Sed quia intellectus supra seipsum reflectitur, secundum eandem reflexionem intelligit et suum intelligere, et speciem qua intelligit. Et sic species intellecta secundario est id quod intelligitur. Sed id quod intelligitur primo, est res cuius species intelligibilis est similitudo"; *ibid.*, I, q. 76, a. 2, ad 4: "Id enim quod intelligitur non est in intellectu secundum se, sed secundum similitudinem; 'lapis enim non est in anima, sed species lapidis,' ut dicitur in *III De An.* Et tamen lapis est id quod intelligitur, non autem species lapidis, nisi per reflexionem intellectus supra seipsum, alioquin scientiae non essent de rebus, sed de speciebus intelligibilibus"; *De ver.*, q. 5, a. 1: "Ipsa cognita per intellectualem visionem res ipsae et non rerum imagines."

[119] E. Gilson, quoted by J. Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 139; "On peut commencer avec Descartes, mais on ne peut finir qu'avec Berkeley ou avec Kant."

> metaphysical knowledge, the supreme wisdom of the natural order.[120]

The two aspects of Brownson's thought, outlined in this chapter, namely: that the mind is unable by its native ability to come to the knowledge of first principles, and that intuitive thought is an act of the object, represent the philosophical equipment with which he prepared to demonstrate the existence of God. As they also complete the section on the general orientation of Brownson's thought, attention may now be given specifically to the application he made of them to the problem of God.

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[120] J. Maritain, *Les degrés du savoir* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie; 1932), p. 153. "La critique de la connaissance suppose avant soi un long effort de savoir,—de connaissance non seulement spontanée mais scientifique,—non seulement scientifique (au sens moderne du mot science) mais philosophique et psychologique, logique et métaphysique. Elle fait elle-même partie du savoir métaphysique, suprême sagesse d'ordre naturel."

CHAPTER III

Brownson and the Existence of God

A favorite approach employed by Brownson in his controversial writings was his contention that, since Christianity is in possession of the truth, it is incumbent on the adversary of any particular belief of Christianity to oust the presumption before the Christian is obliged to plead his case.[1] Applying this to the existence of God, Brownson claimed that theism is in possession[2] and that the atheist must overcome the presumption against him.[3] After showing the inadequacy of various arguments against theism drawn from the alleged progress of science, he concludes that they are not sufficient to overcome the prescriptive argument against them and place Christian theism on the defensive. "Here," according to Brownson, "our refutation of atheism properly ends, and no more need be said; but while we deny that we are bound to do any thing more, we are disposed to produce our title-deeds and prove positively, by unanswerable arguments, the falsity of atheism, or to demonstrate, as fully as logic can demonstrate, Christian theism."[4]

From the time of his conversion Brownson never doubted that the existence of God could be proved by reason. He devoted two articles exclusively to this question[5] and made allusions to it in others.[6] In this he was in complete harmony with the definition of the Church expressed by the Vatican Council[7] and elucidated by

[1] See "Christianity and Positivism" (1871), *Works,* II, 430.

[2] See "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 4.

[3] See *ibid.,* p. 9.

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 32.

[5] See "The Existence of God" (1852), *Works,* I, 253; also "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 1.

[6] See "What Human Reason Can Do" (1855), *Works,* I, 320; also "Aspiration of Nature" (1857), *Works,* XIV, 557, and "Ontologism and Psychologism" (1874), *Works,* II, 474.

[7] See Denzinger, Bannwart, Umberg, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Herder & Co., 1937), n. 1785 and 1806. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *DB.*

the oath against Modernism.[8] However, the *title-deeds* he exhibits to demonstrate Christian theism represent a radical departure from the method of demonstration embodied in the *quinque viae* of Saint Thomas. Brownson, himself, recognized this fact and called it to the attention of his readers:

> The greatest difficulty the reader will find arises from the fact that I have not followed the more common methods of proving the existence of God, and that while I have broached no new system of philosophy, I have adopted an unfamiliar method of demonstration, though in my judgment rendered necessary by the logic of the case. I follow neither the ontological method, nor the psychological method, and adopt neither the argument *a priori* nor the argument *a posteriori,* and while I maintain that the principles of all the real and the knowable are intuitively given I deny that we know that being or God is by intuition.[9]

While, it is true, Brownson uses the word *unfamiliar,* it is difficult to see how it can be anything but a new method of demonstration; for an argument which is neither *a priori* nor *a posteriori* is certainly a new species of demonstration.

Catholic philosophers, apologists, and theologians for centuries have considered the *quinque viae* of Saint Thomas an adequate demonstration of the existence of God. Applying Brownson's own technique to the problem of proving the existence of God, it would seem that it is incumbent upon him to oust the presumption in favor of the Thomistic proofs before introducing a new method of demonstration.

The fundamental objection raised by Brownson against the advocates of the *a posteriori* arguments is that they make an illegitimate use of the principle of causality:

> Men must hold the principle of causality, must believe in a first cause and final cause, and in the necessary relation of cause and effect, before they can either intellectually apprehend order, design, wisdom, or goodness,

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[8] *DB,* 2145.

[9] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, vi.

> in nature, or dream of inferring the existence of God from them, and therefore must really believe in necessary and eternal being, cause and end of all things, that is to say, in God himself. This fact alone condemns the whole physico-theology of your Bridgewater Treatises, and the ordinary argument *a posteriori,* so much insisted upon by the pretended natural theologians of modern times.[10]

In his Essay in Refutation of Atheism Brownson treats the *quinque viae* under the heading of *inconclusive proofs* for the same reason:

> The objection to all arguments of this sort, that is to say, to all psychological, cosmological, and teleological arguments, which depend on the principle of cause and effect, is, that they all beg the question, or take for granted what requires to be proved. They all assume that the soul and cosmos are effects.[11]

That Brownson wrote these objections under the influence of the sage of Königsberg is not a matter of conjecture, for he freely admits their Kantian origin. In regard to the principle of causality he wrote:

> But whatever happens must have a cause, is a synthetic judgment *a priori,* because the predicate, *must have a cause,* is added to the subject, *whatever happens,* and because the judgment involves the conception of necessity, not in any way derivable from experience. The characteristic of synthetic judgments *a priori* is this conception of necessity. Thus far Kant is admirable, and his distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, and between synthetic judgments from experience and synthetic judgments *a priori,* though not absolutely new in the history of philosophy, is of great importance, and was never more finely marked, and leaves nothing on that head to be desired.[12]

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[10] "The Existence of God" (1852), *Works,* I, 261.
[11] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 34.
[12] "The Principle of Causality" (1855), *Works,* I, 388.

The principle of causality, according to Brownson, is a synthetic *a priori* judgment because:

> Kant has settled, if it was not settled before him, that certain conditions *a priori* of all experience are indispensable, that the mind before it can act or form any judgment *a posteriori,* must in some way be placed in possession of certain first principles or necessary truths, which he calls judgments *a priori,* for in every synthetic judgment *a posteriori* there is always a judgment *a priori,* something added, which is not derived from experience, and therefore must have preceded it. The presence of this *a priori* and non-empirical element in all our judgments *a posteriori* is unquestionable. We can never assert any particular act of causation without adding to it the conception of universal and necessary cause, expressed in the axiom. Every effect must have a cause, or, Nothing can begin to exist without a cause.[13]

In reply to a criticism of his new method of demonstration Brownson advised his objector to ". . . read Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* on the question, How synthetic judgments *a priori* are formed? He will discover the importance and necessity of the problem, though Kant certainly will not give him the true solution."[14]

When Kant "awoke from his dogmatic slumber" the first question he asked was "Whether such a thing as metaphysics be at all possible?"[15] To answer this a new science was born, "one which had never occurred to anyone else,"[16] the *Kritik der reinen Ver-*

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[13] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 508.

[14] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 487.

[15] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik,* ed. G. Hartenstein (Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1876), p. 3. ". . . vor allen Dingen zuerst die Frage aufzuwerfen: ob auch so etwas, als Metaphysik, überall nur möglich sei?" See I. Kant, *Prolegomena,* ed. P. Carus (Illinois: the Open Court Publishing Company, 1947), pp. 1 and 20.

[16] *Ibid.,* p. 9. "Allein diese Prolegomena werden ihn dahin bringen, einzusehen, dass es eine ganz neue Wissenschaft sei, von welcher Niemand auch nur den Gedanken worher gefasst hatte, wovon selbst die blase Idee unbekannt war, . . ." See I. Kant, *Prolegomena,* ed. P. Carus (Illinois: the Open Court Publishing Company, 1947), p. 9.

nunft. The fundamental point to be settled by this new science was, "how are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible?"[17] Kant's *Kritik* implies that an anlysis of judgment is a complete analysis of thought.[18] Brownson seems to accept this position without question when he says that every thought is a judgment.[19]

But, according to Thomistic psychology, there are really three acts of the mind: simple apprehension, judgment, and reasoning. In one of the places in which he treats of the acts of the mind Saint Thomas gives a good working definition of judgment in relation to the first operation of the intellect:

> In forming quiddities [by simple apprehension] the intellect has only the similitude of the thing which exists outside the mind, just as the sense insofar as it receives the species of the sensible thing; but when it begins to judge of the thing apprehended, then this judgment itself is a certain property of the intellect, which is not found in the thing. But the judgment is said to be true when it conforms to the thing existing outside the mind. The intellect makes a judgment about the thing apprehended when it says what something is or is not, which is [the act of] the intellect composing or dividing.[20]

Propositions expressing a judgment are distinguished not on the basis of the identification or non-identification of the predicate with the subject but according as the knowledge of this identity (real identity not logical) is derived solely from the analysis of

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[17] Immanuel Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 24. "Die eigentliche mit schulgerechter Praëcision ausgedrückte Aufgabe, auf die alles ankommt, ist also: Wie sind synthetische Stätze *a priori* möglich?" See Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena*, p. 26.

[18] See W. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

[19] See "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works*, I, 297; also "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works*, II, 421.

[20] *De Ver.*, q. 1, a. 3: "Intellectus autem formans quidditates, non habet nisi similitudinem rei existentis extra animam, sicut et sensus in quantum accipit speciem rei sensibilis; sed quando incipit judicare de re apprehensa, tunc ipsum judicium intellectus est quoddam proprium ei, quod non invenitur extra in re. Sed quando adaequatur ei quod est extra in re, dicitur judicium verum esse. Tunc autem judicat intellectus de re apprehensa quando dicit quod aliquid est vel non est, quod est intellectus componentis et dividentis. . . ."

the ideas or from the scrutiny of existing things. Considered from this point of view judgments are of two kinds: *a priori* and a *posteriori.* In an *a priori* judgment (giving immediate knowledge, i.e. *per se nota quoad nos*) the agreement or disagreement of the ideas compared is necessary and is either manifest or can become so by a mere consideration of the ideas themselves. This type of judgment is also called necessary, analytical, metaphysical, absolute. In an *a posteriori* judgment the agreement or disagreement of the ideas compared is not necessary. This type of judgment is also called synthetical, contingent, empirical, physical, hypothetical.

In his *Kritik* Kant introduces a third kind of judgment, the synthetic *a priori.*[21] Now, by its very definition every judgment implies the perception by the mind of the identity or diversity of the idea compared. This can be apprehended either from the consideration of the ideas themselves, and in this case the judgment is *a priori* or analytical; or it can be apprehended from some extrinsic source, i.e., experience, and in this case the judgment is *a posteriori,* or synthetical. Between the *a priori* and *a posteriori* judgment there can hardly be a middle term. Kant's synthetic judgment is really a contradiction in terms, for it destroys the very nature of the judgment itself (which is by definition an act whereby the mind sees the agreement or disagreement between two ideas and then predicates one of the other). So there is a radical contradiction at the root of Kant's synthetic *a priori* judgment. He grants that such judgments are universal and necessary but denies that the predicate is included in the nature of the subject. But it is only by considering the nature of the subject that the mind can affirm the universality and necessity of the predicate. It is impossible to concede universality and necessity to a predicate and then deny that the predicate is included in the *ratio* of the subject.

Brownson and Kant both agreed with Hume that the principle of causality cannot be obtained from experience.[22] Now, from

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[21] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* ed. G. Hartenstein (Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1876), p. 42. "In allen theoretischen Wissenschaften der Vernunft sind synthetische Urtheile *a priori* als Principien enthalten." See I. Kant, *Kritik of Pure Reason,* translated by Max Muller (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934. 2nd ed.), p. 4.

[22] See I. Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, op. cit.,* p. 5. See I. Kant, *Prolegomena, op. cit.,* p. 7.

what has been said about the nature of the act of judgment, it is obvious that the principle of causality is not a synthetic *a priori* judgment. The application of the principle of causality to the proofs for the existence of God is a purely metaphysical problem. Fundamentally it is but a particular instance of an absolutely universal principle that existence is not of the essence of creatures. Saint Thomas explains that although "relation to a cause (*habitudo ad causam*) is not part of the definition of the thing caused, still it follows, as a consequence, on what belongs to its constitutive makeup (*consequitur ad ea quae sunt de eius ratione*); because from the fact that a thing is being by participation it follows that it is caused."[23]

The principle of causality, like the principle of contradiction, is a logical principle. It expresses a fundamental truth which can be deduced almost immediately from any experience by the intellect of man. However the immediate deduction is an act of the intellect and like all intellectual reflection transcends the empiricism of sensible experience. The knowledge of the principle of causality can be had only by the analysis of the subject in the proposition: "every finite, limited, composite, changeable being has a cause," or more simply, "every effect has a cause." The analysis of the subject of these propositions reveals that an essence which is not its own existence postulates an extrinsic cause. This exigency for, or relation to, a cause can in no way be known by experience but only by the intellect as it reflects upon a nature, not indeed as an individual nature, but as finite, composite, changeable nature as such. Consequently the relation arising from the knowledge of the nature of a finite being as such is necessarily universal and only the knowledge of such a universal relation to cause can be the absolute foundation for the universality of the principle of causality.

The principle of causality is an *a priori* (analytical) judgment. In an analytical judgment the predicate is of the essence of the subject. This may mean that the predicate is a constituent of the

[23] *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 44, a. 1, ad Ium: "Dicendum quod licet habitudo ad causam non intret definitionem entis quod est causatum, tamen sequitur ad ea quae sunt de eius ratione; quia ex hoc quod aliquid per participationem est ens, sequitur quod sit causatum ab alio."

essence, as in the judgment, "man is an animal"; or it may mean that the predicate is required by the essence as flowing necessarily from the essence, as in the judgment, "man has intelligence and freedom"; or it may mean that the predicate is required as the term of a relation which is rooted in the very essence of the subject. The principle of causality belongs to this last type of analytical judgments. It can be deduced from the nature of the subject that, because of the distinction between essence and existence in created beings, the whole being must depend upon and have an absolute exigency for an extrinsic cause.

The proof for this may be cast in the following form. *Whatever exist contingently must have a sufficient reason why it exists rather than not. But this sufficient reason is not an intrinsic one, since the essence of the subject is not existence. Therefore, it must be an extrinsic principle; and this is what is meant by an efficient cause.* This argument is clearly a mere analysis of the subject of the proposition "every effect must have a cause" and results in the absolute affirmation of the predicate. The predicate is not *cause* but *must have a cause.* All that analysis must find in the subject is the reason for this necessity, which is adequately expressed by the quotation from Saint Thomas given above; "Though relation to the cause is no part of a thing caused, still it follows, as a consequence, on what belongs to the essence; because from the fact that a thing is being by participation it follows that it is caused." Therefore it follows that the principle of causality is analytical and absolutely certain. For the sake of clarification it might be added that the word *effect* in the principle, "every effect has a cause," is not taken formally to signify that which is caused but rather *that which in any manner comes from non-existence to existence.* It may be said then, Kant and Brownson to the contrary notwithstanding, that the principle of causality is not a synthetic *a priori* judgment. It is an analytical judgment, for the profound reason that the existence of a finite being is not its essence.

However, this was not the only objection Brownson had to the *quinque viae.* "Even if experience could prove particular effects," he said, "and therefore particular and efficient causes we could not conclude from them universal and necessary causes, or the one

universal cause. . . ."[24] It seems apparent from this remark that Brownson missed the point of the *quinque viae*. The minor of each one of the five ways is not a particular movement, a particular contingent being, a particular composite being, a particular instance of design, but rather the metaphysical and universal notion of movement, causality, contingency, composition, and ordination to an end. It is precisely these universal effects as such that demand the existence of an immobile Mover, an uncaused Cause, a first necessary Being, a perfect Being, a supreme Ordainer. In other words, each one of the five ways proceeds from a proper effect to a proper cause. This is precisely what Saint Thomas meant when he said, *ex quolibet effectu potest demonstrari propriam causam eius esse*.[25] Now, as Garrigou-Lagrange indicates, if the proper causes of effects particular and momentary are causes which are also particular and momentary, then the proper cause of universal and permanent effects is likewise universal and permanent and hence belongs to a higher order.[26] Brownson, the logician, could well say that "the argument from the particular to the universal, *non valet* . . . still less the argument from the contingent to the necessary."[27] But Brownson, the metaphysician, was in error when he applied this to the *quinque viae*.

Brownson's treatment of the particular proofs for the existence of God is subject to the same criticism. At first glance, there seems to be an element of truth in his assertion that from the marks of design in the universe all that can be concluded is "simply that the world is ordered and governed by an intelligent mind. . . ."[28] But he adds that the argument from design ". . . does not necessarily carry us beyond the *Anima mundi* of Aristotle, or the Supreme Artificer of Plato, operating with preexisting material and doing

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[24] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works*, II, 34.

[25] *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 2, a. 1.

[26] R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Dieu son existence et sa nature* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et Ses Fils, 1933. 6th ed.), p. 73: ". . . si les effets les plus particuliers et momentanés ont pour cause propre des *causes particulières* et *transitoires*, les effets universels et permanents ont pour cause propre une cause *universelle, permanente*, et par suite supérieure."

[27] "An Old Quarrel" (1867), *Works*, II, 298.

[28] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works*, II, 35.

the best he can with them. They [the marks of design] do not authorize us to conclude the really supramundane God, by the sole energy of his word creating the heavens and the earth and all things therein contained from nothing. . . ."[29] Here he seems to be paraphrasing Kant: "the utmost, therefore, that could be established by such a proof would be an *architect of the world,* always very much hampered by the quality of the material with which he has to work, not a *creator,* to whose, idea everything is subject."[30] The answer to this objection is merely a particular application of the general criticism given above. It is not enough for the *architect of the world* to have intelligence, for some other being would have to be the cause of this intelligence. The Supreme Designer cannot be designed by another or be designed for any other purpose. Taken by itself the fifth proof, from the order in the world, strictly concludes to a Supreme Ordainer but taken in conjunction with the preceding proofs it can be shown that this Supreme Designer must be self-subsisting intelligence and self-subsisting being.

Reduced to its simplest form, Brownson's objection to the *quinque viae* amounts to saying that because creatures cannot exist without God so they cannot be known without God, "What cannot exist alone cannot be known alone."[31] Or, to put it another way, ". . . God alone is intelligible in himself, that is, intelligible without any borrowed light, and that all creatures in themselves are unintelligible."[32] As a result Brownson did not hesitate to assert that, "effects are unintelligible in and by themselves."[33] That this is the root of Brownson's objection to the *quinque viae* is indisputable. "Cause and effect are correlatives, and correlatives connote one another, and neither is knowable alone."[34] "Design and designer

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[29] *Ibid., loc. cit.*

[30] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft, op. cit.,* p. 426. "Der Beweis könnte also höchstens einen Weltbaumeister, der durch die Tauglichkeit des Stoffs, den er bearbeitet, immer sehr eingeschrankt ware, aber nicht einen Weltschopfer, dessen Idee alles unterworfen ist, darthum, . . ."

[31] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 50.

[32] "Gratry on the Knowledge of God" (1855), *Works,* I, 346.

[33] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 528.

[34] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 34.

are correlatives, and connote each other; and consequently the one cannot be proved as the condition of proving the other. . . .[35] ". . . necessary and contingent are correlatives, and there is no intuition of the one without intuition of the other."[36]

This line of thought forms the warp and woof of Brownson's own proof for the existence of God. It is also one of the key-stones of ontologism.[37] Succinctly it can be reduced to this proposition, *"Quod est finitum et contingens nequit cognosci per se, sed praevia cognitione entis infiniti et necessarii."*[38] This proposition is ambiguous and Brownson fails to avoid ambiguity in using it. The finite and contingent cannot *exist* without the necessary, *concedo.* It cannot be thought without previous knowledge of the infinite and necessary, *nego.* In the ontological order all things depend on God for their existence. But *in the order of cognition* it is not true that the mind must *know* God before it can know creatures, Necessary Being before it can know contingent being, Perfect Being before it can know composite being, etc. If we reflect for a moment on the knowledge we have of a man, a tree, or a circle, we are forced to admit that in our knowledge of the nature or essence of these finite things God is in no wise manifest. This simple test of experience is the stumbling-block over which all exclusive *a priorism* trips whether it be that of Kant, the ontologists, or Brownson.

Now while it is true that correlatives connote one another and that when the mind apprehends the finite and the infinite *as* correlatives it ought to know both simultaneously, still it is not true that the mind cannot know the finite except as a correlative. Contingent being can and must be defined without reference to its relation of dependence upon some other being. Contingent being is in fact defined as that which can be and can just as well not be.

As a matter of fact, the idea of the infinite presupposes the idea

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[37] See T. M. Zigliara, *Della luce intellettuale e dell'ontologismo* (Rome: Tipografia Cattolica Di F. Chiapperini E. C., 1874), I, 153, see A. Lepidi, *Examen philosophico-theologicum de ontologismo* (Louvain: C. J. Fonteyn, 1874), p. 133.

[38] See Lepidi, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

of the finite, not the other way 'round. The idea of God can be resolved into three intellectual elements. First, the mind conceives God indefinitely and universally as being. Then, it considers this being as endowed with every perfection; life, goodness, wisdom, power, etc. Finally it removes from the perfection of God all limits. These three elements presuppose previous knowledge of creatures. God, as an object of natural reason, can be conceived by the intellect only by attributing to Him perfections which it first sees in creatures. There is no other way to account for the knowledge of goodness, wisdom, life, etc., which *de facto* the mind attributes to God. Moreover, before the mind can remove limits to these perfections it is absolutely necessary that it already have conceived the imperfection and finiteness of creatures. How could it otherwise remove one thing from another without some previous knowledge of the perfection in question? It is obvious that the natural knowledge of God can be acquired only by comparison with creatures. Therefore it is not by any previous knowledge of the infinite that the mind comes to a knowledge of the finite but rather it is only by previous knowledge of the finite that the mind can come to a knowledge of the infinite.

There is a theological implication in Brownson's argument which places him in a somewhat peculiar position in regard to the express teaching of the Church. Brownson accepted the decision of the Vatican Council that the existence of God can be proved by the light of natural reason but he rejected in unequivocal terms the means indicated by this same Council whereby reason is able to rise to a knowledge of God's existence. The Council teaches that it is from created things that the existence of God can be known with certainty, *e rebus creatis certo cognosci potest.*[39] Yet Brownson says, "none of these individual things, nor all of them together, are God, or contain him, how, then, from them, supposing you know them, rise scientifically to him?"[40] From a philosophical point of view Brownson had the right to ask *how* the mind can rise to a knowledge of God from created things. But from a theological point of view he had no right to deny the fact that the

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[39] *DB,* 1785.

[40] "Christianity and Positivism" (1871), *Works,* II, 435.

mind *can* rise to a knowledge of God from created things. For in so doing he is denying a proposition which if not proposed as a truth of Catholic faith at least has the character of certain doctrine.[41] And if, as Garrigou-Lagrange maintains, the expression *e rebus creatis* is more than a mere indication but actually part of the truth defined, then Brownson's contention would seem to be not only erroneous but also contrary to orthodox teaching.[42]

Brownson appealed to Scripture to support his thesis that the mind cannot come to a knowledge of God from created things. The choice of his text was unfortunate. It happened to be the very one which the Vatican Council employed to teach the contrary. It is true that the Council did not intend to give *ex professo* an interpretation of this passage from the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans. But it did give some indication of what that interpretation will be. Moreover, Brownson's interpretation of the text can hardly be considered a piece of objective scholarship in the field of scriptural exegesis. He approached the text not as a scripture scholar, nor as a theologian, but as a philosopher with the preconceived notion that "we are unable to conceive the possibility of constructing an argument to prove that God is, which does not assume that he is, both as its necessary conditions and principle."[43] When Brownson wrote that, his exegesis of Saint Paul to the Romans was already determined *a priori*. As a result Brownson, the exegete, could never ask himself: does Saint Paul mean that the mind can rise to a knowledge of God's existence from created things? Brownson the philosopher had already decided that such a process was impossible.

The following examples of Brownson's exegesis should suffice to substantiate the criticism just given of Brownson's use of the passage in question. One of the first times he appeals to the text is in the passage quoted above:

> What we have denied and attempted to disprove is, that God is known only as contained implicitly in his works

[41] See J. Vacant, *Études théologiques sur les constitutions du concile du vatican* (Paris: Delhomme et Briguet, 1895), I, 296.

[42] See R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[43] An A Priori Autobiography" (1850), *Works*, I, 246-247.

and discursively obtained from them; but we have not asserted, or intended to assert, that he is known as God without his works. *Invisibilia ipsius, a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur* (Rom. 1, 20), says St. Paul, and he seems to us to express precisely our meaning.[44]

Saint Paul tells us that "the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and divinity, are clearly seen from the beginning of the world, being understood by the things that are made," Rom. 1. 20, but the Apostle does not tell us that the existence of God is a logical conclusion from cosmological or psychological facts or from "the things that are made."[45]

What God is can be demonstrated only by his works, and that it can be so demonstrated St. Paul assures us, Rom. 1, 20: *Invisibilia ipsius, a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur; sempiterna quoque eius virtus et divinitas;* or as we venture to English it: "The invisible things of God, even his eternal power and divinity, are clearly seen from the foundation of the world, being understood (or known) by the things that are made." St. Paul appeals to the things that are made not to prove that God is, but to show what he is, or rather, if we may so express ourself, to prove that he is God, and leaves us, as does St. Thomas, to prove, with St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Fenelon, and others, that he is, commonly called the *argumentum a priori,* though that strictly speaking, it is not, for there is nothing more ultimate in science than is God himself, or, rather, that which is God.[46]

It is very true, nothing more true than that "the heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands," but to him only who has the idea of God or already believes that he is. Nothing more true than that God can be traced in all his works, or that "the invisible things of him, even his eternal power and divinity, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made," but

[44] *Ibid.,* p. 251.
[45] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 39.
[46] "An Old Quarrel" (1867), *Works,* II, 305.

> only by those who already learned that he is, are intent on answering the question, *Quid est Deus?* not the question, *An sit Deus?*[47]

Brownson's *a priori* approach was not limited to Saint Paul. The Angelic Doctor, he says, "cites this text [Rom. 1, 20], to prove what God is, rather than to prove that he is, for he throughout is replying to the question *Quid est Deus,* rather than to the question, *An sit Deus,* as may be seen by referring to the first article of the question cited above, in which he answers the question, *Utrum Deum esse sit per se notum.*"[48] It is hard to excuse of superficiality such a reading of Saint Thomas. Brownson's statement that Saint Thomas is referring throughout to the question *quid sit Deus* rather than to the question *an sit Deus* is unaccountable. Could he possibly have mistaken the objection, *videtur quod Deum esse sit per se notum,*[49] for the proposition Saint Thomas is setting out to prove? Even so could he possibly have read in the body of the article, *Sed quia nos non scimus de Deo quid est, non est nobis per se nota, sed indiget demonstrari per ea quae magis nota quoad nos et minus nota quoad naturam, scilicet per effectus,*[50] and still maintained that Saint Thomas is talking throughout of the nature and not the existence of God? Could he possibly have read in the second article of the second question, *Sed contra est quod Apostolus dicit, Ad Rom. 1, 20: "Invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur." Sed hoc non esset, nisi per ea quae facta sunt, posset demonstrari Deum esse; primum enim quod oportet intelligi de aliquo, est an sit,*[51] and maintain that Saint Thomas is appealing to Saint Paul to prove not the existence of God but the nature of God?

To understand Brownson's approach to the problem of God it is necessary to remember that for him the only question the

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[47] "Christianity and Positivism" (1871), *Works,* II, 439.

[48] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 40. Brownson's citation of Saint Thomas is inaccurate. The reference he gives is to the first part of the *Sum. theol.* question one, articles two and three. The correct reference is to the second question of the first part.

[49] See *Sum. theol.,* I, q. 2, a. 1.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] *Sum. theol.,* I, q. 2, a. 2, *sed contra.*

mind can really ask is *Quid sit Deus,* never *An sit Deus.* This does not mean that he failed to give his own account of the origin of the mind's knowledge of God's existence. But he did fail to realize that his account of the origin of this knowledge is by no means indisputable.

If Brownson were asked if it is possible for the mind to come into possession of this knowledge by its own native power he would answer, "if we could suppose a people at any time entirely destitute of the belief, in total ignorance of God, with no conception of his being, we should be obliged to suppose them remaining forever without it, unless taught it supernaturally by God himself, or by teachers from some other people who had already been taught it."[52] And if asked why this is so he would say, "the reason of this is, that there is no conceivable process whereby the mind can originate it, which does not presuppose that the mind is already in possession of it."[53] According to Brownson, the problem of proving the existence of God has been obscured,

> . . . and rendered difficult to ordinary minds by our modern philosophers, who have proceeded on the supposition that, in order to know, that God is, we must be able to originate the belief in his existence, and to demonstrate it from certain principles or premises more immediately known to the mind than is God himself.[54]

In Brownson's opinion:

> God, if he be at all, must be in the intelligible order, or rather that order itself, as distinguished from the sensible. He certainly is no object of our senses as is conceded on all hands. . . . Before we can distinctly conceive that he is, we must have the truth that he is, sensibly expressed to us, that is, expressed to us by sensible signs, in words, or language. Hence we could not attain to the belief that God is, could have no distinct belief that he is, unless taught it through the medium of words by someone other than ourselves.[55]

[52] "The Existence of God" (1852), *Works,* I, 258.
[53] *Ibid.,* p. 259.
[54] *Ibid.,* p. 257.
[55] *Ibid.,* p. 264.

Passages such as these are ambiguous. As a philosopher Brownson is free to speculate on the origin of the idea of God's existence. But when he says that men ignorant of God could never come to a knowledge of God, he is denying them the possibility of proving the existence of God which has been defined by the Vatican Council. If he had distinguished between the *fact* of men so coming to a knowledge of God and the *possibility* of their so doing he would have been safe enough, but such a distinction is not apparent in the texts quoted. Moreover, when he says that men can have no distinct belief that God is unless taught it "through the medium of language by someone other than ourselves" he is making an undue concession to Traditionalism, which overemphasizes the role of language in thought and underestimates the spontaneous power of human reason. He accepted as undeniable facts certain Traditionalist tenets:

> As a fact, man never has invented language; as a fact, man has never by his unaided efforts found out first principles or necessary truths, the existence and natural attributes of God, the immortality and immateriality of the soul, liberty, and moral obligation, for they were taught to the first man by his Maker, and have been taught to all since by society, which inherits the original instruction. The Traditionalists in asserting all this assert only a fact.[56]

It is rather disturbing to be told that "so far we must all be Traditionalists."[57] However, Brownson realized that if he went no further than this, the existence of God would never be a matter of science but rather of faith. Tradition, according to Brownson, is sufficient to ". . . establish the validity of the belief in God, it is true, but it would not make his existence a matter of science."[58] It is not the fact that men believe in God that requires proof but rather the very existence of the Being to which the fact attests.

The question Brownson now has to answer is, in what does the proof for the existence of God consist? He maintained that "the

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[56] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 515.
[57] *Ibid.,* p. 515.
[58] "The Existence of God" (1852), *Works,* I, 266.

refutation of atheism does not lie in demonstrating from principles distinct from God that God is" but "it lies in showing that the human intellect has in its operation immediate intuition of that which is God. . . ."[59] This would seem to mean that the existence of God is already apprehended before demonstrated, and the reason for this is:

> In the order of reality there can be no principles more ultimate than God, for he is himself prior to all not himself. If at all, he is himself ultimate, the first principle conceivable or possible, and therefore there can be no principle from which his existence is concludable. There can be none in the order of knowledge. In what we know, God is either apprehended or he is not. If not, he cannot be concluded; if he is, then he is apprehended prior to the logical process, and not obtained by it, and all it can do is to clear up and establish the fact that what we do really apprehend is God.[60]

From this it follows that:

> The process of demonstrating that God is consists in identifying, by reflection and reasoning, the necessary ideas or ideal intuition with real, necessary, universal and immutable being, and real necessary being in which they are all identified with God.[61]

Reduced to its simplest form Brownson's *demonstration* of the existence of God consists in establishing a double identity; the identity of necessary ideas with necessary being, and the identity of necessary being with God. Lest perhaps this be criticized as an over simplification of Brownson's position it might be well to point out that he, himself, considered it to be the whole point of his *Essay in Refutation of Atheism,* "the process by which this double identity is obtained or proved is given in the *Essay in Refutation of Atheism. . . .*"[62]

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[59] *Ibid.,* p. 257.
[60] *Ibid.,* p. 262.
[61] "Christianity and Positivism" (1871), *Works,* II, 437-438
[62] "Ontologism and Psychologism" (1874), *Works,* II, 477.

It is imperative to remember that just as Brownson criticized the *quinque viae* of Saint Thomas from a Kantian standpoint so he began the construction of his own proof from the same vantage point: "It must be borne in mind that Kant has proved that without *cognitions a priori,* or what we call the ideal, no cognition *a posteriori* is possible."[63] Now what, according to Brownson, are these *cognitions a priori* without which there ". . . is and can be no intelligible object and consequently no thought . . ."?[64] They are "the categories of necessity and contingency" which "not being empirical, since they are the forms under which we necessarily apprehend every object we do apprehend, we call them ideas, or the ideal."[65] In Brownson's thought and terminology, the categories of necessity and contingency, synthetic *a priori* cognitions, and ideas are synonymous. The only question which remains to be settled is:

> Is the ideal, without which no fact of experience is possible, on the side of the object, or on the side of the subject? Kant places it on the side of the subject, and subjects the object to the laws of the soul; we place it on the side of the object, and hold that it is that without which the object is not intelligible, and therefore no object at all. Hence we maintain that the object of thought is not a simple unit, but consists of three inseparable elements, the ideal, the empirical, and their relation.[66]

In his first step Brownson agrees with Kant that there are certain *a priori* conditions requisite for thought. These are the categories of necessity and contingency. The mind is unable by its own operation to form these ideas. They are entirely on the side of the object and must be produced by the object, ". . . the object by an objective act independent of the intellect, must place itself in relation with the subject."[67] This presentation of the object to the intellect is what Brownson calls *ideal intuition.*[68] By merely

[63] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 49.
[64] *Ibid.,* p. 47.
[65] *Ibid.,* p. 51.
[66] *Ibid.,* pp. 51-52.
[67] *Ibid.,* p. 53.
[68] See *ibid.,* p. 54.

waving the wand of ideal intuition over the synthetic *a priori* judgment of Kant, Brownson believed he had redeemed the world of thought from the slavery of subjectivism. The fundamental error involved in this process has been indicated in the criticism of Brownson's analysis of thought given in the preceding chapter. In spite of his protestation to the contrary Brownson is inextricably bound up in the web of his own thought rather than in an analysis of reality. Because of this he failed to perceive the vicious circle he falls into when he attempts to prove the objective validity of these cognitions *a priori* which are in no wise the product of the intellect:

> They are intuitive because they are the necessary conditions *a priori* of experience or the soul's intellectual action; and they are objective, since otherwise they could not be intuitive, for intuition is the act of the object, not of the subject.[69]

Obviously Brownson's process of double identification, i.e., identifying necessary ideas with necessary being, and necessary being with God, rests ultimately on the nature of ideas. In regard to this Brownson admitted that his theory of ideas bears some relation to Platonism.[70] In 1850 he wrote that "there are no abstractions in nature," and that "abstractions are nullities, and yield only nullity that ideas are not mere words, are not mental conceptions, are not subjective forms of the understanding, are not *ours,* but are real *intelligibilia,* intelligible objects, objects of our intellect, not our intellect, nor the products of our intellect itself, . . ."[71] If true this of course exploded the old scholastic doctrine of ideas.[72] Since, according to Brownson, an abstract idea is a mere nullity[73] it follows that he has "already proved the identity of the ideal and the real."[74] Moreover, he maintained that ideas "must be distinct from us and exist independent of us. . . . Hence, while both the created subject and the created object depend on

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[69] *Ibid.,* p. 56.
[70] See "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 402.
[71] "An A Priori Autobiography" (1850), *Works,* I, 250.
[72] See "J. V. H. on Brownson's Review" (1853), *Works,* XIV, 324.
[73] See "Professor Bascom's Lectures" (1873), *Works,* II, 449.
[74] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 481.

the idea, the one to be intelligible and the other to be intelligent, the idea, the intelligible species, the light—as we prefer to say—is independent of both."[75] Ideas, "must be active, offer a counter-pressure to the mind, and therefore cannot be the mind's own creation, or product, or laws even, but must be objective, independent of the subject, and real or exist *a parte rei,* as say the schoolmen."[76]

It is true, as Brownson claims, that there are "no abstractions in nature" but it is not true that the human intellect, in its present state, does not have an abstract knowledge of nature. Brownson insisted that universal scepticism ultimately refutes itself for it requires thought to deny thought.[77] But he failed to see the equally obvious fact that the denial of the abstract character of thought involves the use of abstract thought. All his speculation on the existence of God is an affirmation of the very thing he is denying. For what are "ideal intuitions," "empirical intuitions," "categories of necessity and contingency," if not abstractions? There is not the least evidence in experience, or in philosophical reflection on experience, for *ideal intuition,* in Brownson's sense of the word. Ideal intuition is a purely gratuitous and arbitrary device. In emancipating the intellect from the slavery of "the world of abstractions in which a feeble scholasticism envelops the Divine Being"[78] ideal intuition exiled the mind from its native land.

The quotations given above indicate the radical divergence in the appeal to experience made by Brownson and Saint Thomas. For Brownson, experience must conform to an *a priori* theory. For Saint Thomas theory must conform to experience. Man has a two-fold knowledge: that of sense and intellect. The senses know this single, concrete, physical thing; this man, this tree, this triangle. But the intellect knows the nature of man, of trees, of triangles. The senses attain the individual; the intellect grasps the universal. Now, it is by means of ideas that the intellect grasps the nature of things. Ideas are the means through which the intellect attains intelligible reality, they are the media through which it sees uni-

[75] "An Old Quarrel" (1867), *Works,* II, 302.
[76] "Professor Bascom's Lectures" (1873), *Works,* II, 454.
[77] See "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 42.
[78] "Ontologism and Psychologism" (1876), *Works,* II, 485.

versal natures. They are formal signs which manifest the real to the intellect. They are spiritual images which the mind possesses and through which it knows the secrets of reality. In short, ideas are not *that which* the intellect knows but *that through which* it knows.

If there is anything about the formation of ideas that man can learn from experience it is the fact that they are formed by man himself. In denying this, Brownson was contradicting his own experience. For the tireless energy he expended in the formation of his theory of knowledge was a silent witness to the fact that he was the author of the ideas therein contained. If he had paused to reflect of the significance of the fact that all the ideas contained in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and in the *Introduzione allo studio della filosofia* were entering his mind through the sense of sight, he might have hit upon the true meaning of the scholastic axiom he so often quoted, *nihil est in intellectu nisi quod prius fuerit in sensu.*

For the scholastics, sense knowledge is a cause of intellectual knowledge. For Brownson this was like trying to get something from nothing. If Saint Thomas held that the senses were the *only* cause of the formation of ideas, if he held that the sensible object *alone* caused intellectual knowledge, if he proposed the material as the *adequate* cause of the spiritual knowledge of the intellect, then Brownson's objection would be valid. But this is not the meaning of the axiom, *nihil est in intellect nisi quod prius fuerit in sensu.* Sense knowledge alone is not the adequate cause of intellectual knowledge. Ideas are the product of the active intellect working on the sensible image (phantasm), and elevating it to the spiritual order. Both the senses and the active intellect are necessary for the spiritualization of the object. The active intellect illuminates the object presented by the senses but the actual production of the idea is the work of the faculty which common sense recognizes as the intellect. So the formation of an idea is a vital and immanent act which not only proceeds from the intellect, but is accomplished and exists in the intellect itself. In this sense, ideas considered as residing in the intellect are truly said to be subjective.

It is not the object which places itself in relation with the in-

tellect "by an objective act independent of the subject" but rather it is the concept expressed *a mente et in mente* which presents the object to the mind.[79] For the sake of clarity it is necessary to distinguish between the objective concept and the subjective (formal) concept. The subjective (formal) concept is *id, in quo intelligimus;* while the objective concept is *id, quod intelligimus formaliter.*[80] The formal concept is a concept in the strict sense of the word while the objective concept is so designated only analogously.[81] As a matter of fact the term *objective concept* is a shorter and perhaps inaccurate way of saying *the object* of the concept. It is not a concept at all but rather the thing known by means of the concept.[82] The formal concept is the *imago intentionalis* in which the mind contemplates the object. Brownson speaks of images, representations, immaterial forms, and intelligible species, but only to reject them. For according to him, "what, in this theory [the scholastic theory of cognition] is immediately present to the mind is the image, form, or *species,* not the thing itself. . . ."[83] His scandal at the notion of an image existing between the subject knowing and the object known flows from a misunderstanding of the nature of the formal concept. The formal concept is a sign of the thing. But it is the unique instance of a formal sign. The difference between an instrumental sign (*signum ex quo*) and a formal sign (*signum in quo*) is that the *signum ex quo* represents something other than itself by means of previous knowledge of itself; while the *signum in quo* represents something other than itself without previous knowledge of itself. In other words; the concept attains the thing first and it is only by another act of the mind that the mind knows the concept as such.

From what has been said it would seem that Brownson's contention that ideas must "be distinct from us and exist independently of us,"[84] and that necessary ideas are not mental con-

[79] See J. Maritain, *op. cit.,* p. 140: ". . . c'est le concept qui présente l'object à l'esprit."

[80] See J. Gredt, *op. cit.,* I, 1.

[81] See *ibid., loc. cit.*

[82] See J. Sullivan, *First Principles in Thought and Being* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1939), p. 4.

[83] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 510.

[84] "An Old Quarrel" (1867), *Works,* II, 302.

cepts,[85] must be dismissed as untenable. But it was precisely this mistaken conception of the nature of ideas that forms the basis of Brownson's *double identification* by which he attempts to prove the existence of God. According to him, ideas are ". . . necessary, immutable, universal, eternal . . ."[86] they bear "the characteristics of necessity, universality, and immutability and therefore they must be real and necessary being. . . ."[87] This is obviously not the case and a distinction, or more properly several distinctions, must be made to clear up the confusion in such an argument.

An idea, formal concept, *verbum mentis,* subjectively considered, is a product of the intellect and participates in the conditions of the intellect that produces it. The human intellect is finite, created, contingent, mutable, and its ideas are likewise finite, created, contingent, mutable. So in respect to its entitative being, *in ratione essendi,* no human idea is necessary, immutable, eternal. But if ideas are considered objectively, *in ratione repraesentandi,* then the term represented by the concept, the object of the concept, can be finite or infinite. Brownson's reluctance to admit the finite nature of ideas basically can be reduced to his failure to grasp this distinction. Fundamentally his objection can be reduced to this: there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite, the contingent and the necessary, the created and the uncreated; how then can the finite, contingent, created, account for the mind's knowledge of infinite, uncreated, necessary Being? To avoid all ambiguity let it be said that even when ideas objectively considered represent infinite and necessary being they do so in a finite manner.

Brownson is confusing two things which must always be distinguished, i.e., conformity or proportion *secundum esse entitativum* and conformity *secundum esse repraesentativum.* In order that there be conformity between two things *secundum esse entitativum* it is indeed necessary that they both possess the same entity or perfection. For example, between two men there is said to be conformity of identity *secundum esse substantiae;* between two quantities of the same degree there is said to be conformity

[85] See "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 418.
[86] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 496.
[87] "Professor Bascom's Lectures" (1873), *Works,* II, 454.

of equality *secundum esse quantitatis;* between two qualities there is said to be conformity of similarity *secundum esse qualitatis.* But conformity *secundum esse repraesentativum* is not to be sought in this manner but rather in the very *ratio* of representation itself, which consists in a certain relation according to which something is formally manifested. For example, an image in a mirror is a certain relation, i.e., it exercises a relational function, in virtue of which the object of which it is an image is manifested or reflected in the mirror. Now in order that one thing represent another there is no need that there be conformity *secundum esse entitativum* with the thing but only *in ratione repraesentandi.*[88]

In the light of these distinctions, Brownson's assertion that ideas "bear the characteristics of necessity, universality, and immutability, and therefore must be real and necessary being"[89] is false. Considered subjectively no human idea bears these characteristics for it is the product of a finite intellect. To maintain the contrary would be to confuse the human intellect with the Divine Intellect. Considered objectively, there is a sense in which these characteristics can be predicated of ideas. For instance, a moment's reflection is sufficient to verify the fact that the realities represented by universal ideas may or may not exist. Actual existence is predicated of things accidently, contingently, mutably. But abstracting from actual existence, these ideas, or rather the essences represented by them, are necessary, eternal, and immutable. For example, a circle insofar as it exists *in rerum natura* depends on some cause, it exists in a definite place at a definite time, it is contained in a definite matter of a certain quality and quantity; and thus it is something contingent, mutable, relative, and temporal. However, if the *ratio* of the circle is considered as logically prescinding from the cause on which it depends, from the matter in which it exists, from the place, time, and all other conditions, which are outside its essence, then without any other addition (by the force of abstraction and mental precision alone), it is necessary, absolute, and eternal. But absolute, necessary, eternal being of this kind is not something positive, but negative; for the *ratio* which was first contingent, becomes, without the addition of any new

[88] See Lepidi, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[89] "Professor Bascom's Lectures" (1873), *Works,* II, 454.

element and by logical abstraction alone, necessary, absolute, immutable. Now it is obvious that necessity, immutability, and eternity of this kind, abstracting from actual existence, cannot be identified with the necessity, immutability, and eternity of Divine Being.

It has been shown in the first part of this chapter that Brownson never really seems to have understood the *quinque viae* of Saint Thomas. For this reason it appears safe to conclude that his objection to the traditional method of proving the existence of God failed to oust the presumption in its favor. The second part represents *all there is to Brownson's own demonstration.* According to him, "it consists in identifying, by reflection and reasoning, the necessary ideas or ideal intuition with real, necessary, universal and immutable being, and real necessary being in which they are all identified with God."[90] His demonstration is not, strictly speaking, a proof of the existence of God, but an attempt to establish certain philosophical prerequisites for this process of double identification, presuming that once these are admitted the existence of God is evident. But it is precisely because these philosophical prerequisites are untenable that he fails to establish the existence of God. His point of departure is an analysis of thought which has been shown to ignore completely the abstractive character of intellectual knowledge. His assertion that Kantian subjectivism is refuted and the objectivity of knowledge guaranteed by placing the categories (synthetic *a priori* judgments, ideal intuition) on the side of the object rests on the gratuitous assumption that the object presents itself to the mind as it actually exists *in re.* Finally, the identification of real and necessary ideas with real and necessary being rests on a psychologically unsound theory of ideas. For these reasons it seems that from the logic of the case Brownson presented his approach to the problem of God is objectively invalid.

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[90] "Christianity and Positivism" (1871), *Works,* II, 437-438.

CHAPTER IV

Ontologism

There is another element in Brownson's speculation on the existence of God which demands attention, and that is the charge of ontologism. It is indisputable that Brownson's approach to the problem of God left him wide open to attack. The point around which his antagonists rallied was the charge of ontologism. Brownson was called "the most distinguished representative of ontologism in America."[1] The author of the article on ontologism in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* claims that *l'ontologisme est representé en Amérique par Brownson.*[2] He was equivalently classified as an ontologist by Father Sauvage, who maintained that Brownson accepted and defended the famous formula of Gioberti, *ens creat existentias.*[3] The opinion that Brownson is an ontologist is expressed in Arthur Preuss' adapted edition of Father Pohle's *God: His Knowability Essence, and Attributes.*[4]

The author of an article in the *London Month* wished to go on record as "dissenting from even the mitigated system of ontologism which Brownson adopted."[5] John Healy, writing in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record,* feels that "the ontologism of Brownson is radically as untenable and as dangerous in its consequences as any of the systems he reprehends."[6] The English edition of Brother Louis' *Elementary Course of Christian Philosophy* affirms that "some of the writings of the illustrious O. A. Brownson are un-

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[1] W. Turner, *op. cit.,* p. 636.

[2] A. Fonck, "Ontologisme," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique,* XI, col. 1039.

[3] See G. Sauvage, "Ontologism," *Catholic Encyclopedia,* XI, 257.

[4] See J. Pohle, *God: His Knowability, Essence, and Attributes,* adapted and edited by Arthur Preuss (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1925), p. 120.

[5] "Brownson's Works," *The Month,* XLVII (March, 1883), 430.

[6] Quoted by S. Raemer's, *America's Foremost Philosopher* (Washington, D. C.: St. Anselm's Priory, 1931), p. 26.

mistakably ontologistic."[7] In 1918 Virgil Michel published his doctoral dissertation, *The Critical Principles of Orestes A. Brownson,* in which he claimed Brownson was an ontologist.[8] Then in 1927 he modified this statement by saying that while "Brownson from 1842 to 1844 should be classed as an ontologist his status subsequently still awaits final definitive statement."[9] Theodore Maynard seems unable to make up his mind on the question. In one place he says, "as for his philosophy it seems to me that the common charge of ontologism—which is still frequently brought against him to his damage—cannot be substantiated."[10] The accusation, according to Maynard, "was largely due to his marvelous gift for making enemies."[11] Maynard's final judgment on the question was the hypothetical proposition, "If he was an ontologist in 1850, he was one when he died in 1876."[12] Henry Brownson, his father's biographer, states that "Brownson from 1842 to 1844 should be classed as an ontologist."[13]

Sidney Raemer's position is clearly manifested in these words, "the question of Brownson's orthodoxy must be restricted to his views as a Catholic writer. Indeed we could be no more justified in accusing Brownson of advocating ontologism after his conversion because he was a believer in that doctrine before his conversion than in making the claim that St. Augustine was a brilliant protagonist of Manicheism because he attached himself to that sect before his entrance into the Church."[14] It is difficult to see the parity between Brownson and Augustine. Saint Augustine was not accused of being a Manicheian after his conversion while Brownson *was* accused of being an ontologist. Perhaps the most

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[7] *Elementary Course of Christian Philosophy* (New York: O'Shea and Co., 1893. 2nd ed.), p. 84.

[8] See V. Michel, *The Critical Principles of Orestes A. Brownson* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1918), p. 43.

[9] V. Michel, "Brownson, A Man of Men," *The Catholic World,* CXXV (September, 1927), 761.

[10] T. Maynard, *op. cit.,* p. XI.

[11] *Ibid., loc. cit.*

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 275.

[13] H. F. Brownson, *Brownson's Middle Life* (Detroit: H. F. Brownson, Publisher, 1899), II, 212.

[14] S. A. Raemer, *op. cit.,* p. 30.

objective statement of Brownson's position is that given by Doctor Connell in an article on "The Theological Schools of America":

> It is not surprising that a self-taught Theologian should have erred in some of the technicalities of Catholic Dogma. Brownson mistakenly included in the formal object of Divine Faith the proposal of revealed truth by the Church. He was also inclined towards the philosophical theory of ontologism as propounded by his contemporary, Gioberti. Yet it remains true that Brownson accomplished much in the field of apologetic Theology.[15]

The investigation of this aspect of Brownson's approach to the problem of God will be the subject of the last two chapters of this dissertation. The present chapter will deal with ontologism in general and the other with the ontologistic implications of Brownson's approach to the problem of God.

There are several reasons why a special chapter on ontologism may not be deemed superfluous. Historically, much of Brownson's speculation on the existence of God was determined by the rise, spread, and influence of ontologism in the nineteenth century. Philosophically, ontologism is an extremely subtle error and some attention must be given to its fundamental postulates. Theologically, it has been stigmatized as a doctrine which cannot be safely taught and the action of the Holy See in its regard must be given consideration. It seems expedient to attempt a brief synthesis of the various elements involved in ontologism in order to prepare the ground for a study of Brownson's thought in relation to this erroneous system.

Vincenzo Gioberti was the first philosopher to use the word ontologism.[16] He employed it to distinguish his system from Cartesianism, which he called psychologism.[17] Whatever might be

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[15] F. J. Connell, "The Theological Schools in America," contributed to *Essays on Catholic Education in the United States,* edited by R. J. Deferrari (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1943), p. 223.

[16] See L. Baur, "Ontologismus," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche,* VII, 723.

[17] See V. Gioberti, *Introduzione allo studio della filosofia,* tr. J. Alary (Paris: Dumoulin, 1845), II, 65: "Je définis donc le Psychologisme: un système qui déduit l'intelligible du sensible, et l'ontologie de la psychologie.

their accidental differences the ontologists agree substantially on what essentially constitutes their system.

Sans Fiel claims that the fundamental idea of ontologism consists "in the immediate perception of absolute being" and adds "such is the opinion of the great majority of ontologists and psychologists."[18] Fabre defines ontologism as a "system which admits in the human soul an immediate knowledge of God."[19] Saint Thomas, according to Ubaghs, admits the first principle of ontologism: the identity of all intelligible truth with God, but denies the second: "the immediate view of infinite being by the human mind."[20] Gaetano Milone taught that the intelligible is uncreated and is God and concludes that "in the same manner as the mind has intuition of the intelligible so it has intuition of God."[21] This opinion was shared by Father Vercellone and the Abate Francesco Seni.[22] From these representative quotations it may be gathered that ontologism is a system which asserts that God is immediately and *per se* presented to the created intellect and becomes the intelligible light and the ideal *ratio* in which the mind naturally intuits

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Je nommerai Ontologisme le système contraire, qui enseigne à tracer exactement le chemin que doit suiver celui qui veut philosopher avec justesse."

[18] Sans-Fiel, *De l'orthodoxie de l'ontologisme modéré et traditionnel,* quoted by A. Fonck, "Ontologisme," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique,* XI, col. 1000: "L'idée fondamentale de l'ontologisme ne consiste pas, comme vous le pensez avec M. l'abbe Fabre, dans l'identification des idées générales avec Dieu, mais dans la perception immédiate de Être absolu. Telle est l'opinion de l'immense majorité des ontologistes et psychologistes."

[19] Fabre, *Reponse aux lettres d'un sensualiste contre l'ontologisme,* quoted by Fonck, *op. cit.,* XI, col. 1001: ". . . un système qui admet, dans l'âme humaine une connaissance immédiate de Dieu."

[20] *Ibid.,* XI, col. 1001: "Il [Saint Thomas] n'admet pas la seconde: la vue immédiate de la vérité."

[21] Quoted by T. Zigliara, *Della luce intellettuale e dell'ontologismo* (Rome: Tipografia Cattolica Di F. Chiapperini E. C., 1874), II, 383: "Oro si è detto che l'intelligibile è increato, è la verita, è Dio. Dunque in quel modo che la mente nostra intuisce l'intelligibile intuisce immediatamente Iddio."

[22] See Zigliara, *ibid., loc. cit.,* "Col Milone sente il patre Vercellone maestro al primo, e all'uno e all'altro quanto alla sostanza della teorica si è aggiunto il ch. Abate Francesco Seni."

God and sees all absolute, eternal, immutable, and necessary truths in him.[23]

Ontologism was presented to the Catholic schools under the guise of tradition. An impressive genealogy was created for it by its various proponents. It was said to be the true thought of such thinkers as Plato, Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm, and Saint Bonaventure. In modern times ontologism, with all its implications, was already anticipated by Marsilio Ficina in his *Theologia platonica de animarum immortalitate* (Florence, 1492).[24] The father of modern ontologism was Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715). By a curious anomaly the learned Oratorian, who was definitely a Cartesian,[25] received unbounded praise from the ontologists to whom Descartes was anathema.[26] Of his works the two most quoted by subsequent ontologists are *Recherche de la vérité* and *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et la religion.* In the eighteenth century the most representative of the ontologists was Cardinal Gerdil (1718-1802). His principal work from this point of view was *Défense du sentiment du Père Malebranche sur l'origine et la nature des idées contre l'examen de Locke.*

Ontologism really attained its peak of influence in the nineteenth century. In the year 1840 the first edition of Gioberti's *Introduzione allo studio della filosofia* appeared in Brussels. Gioberti's philosophy was a curious mixture of ontologism, platonism, and traditionalism.

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[23] A. Lepidi, *Examen philosophico-theologicum de ontologismo* (Louvain: C. J. Fonteyn, 1874), p. 9: "Ontologismus est systema in quo asseritur Deum esse immediate et per se praesentem intellectui creato; eique se objicere tamquam lucem intelligibilem, et rationem idealem, in qua mens Deum ipsum naturaliter intuetur, ac omnes necessarias immutabiles aeternas et absolutas."

[24] See A. Stöckl, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kircheim, 1870), p. 522: "Das interessanteste in seiner *Theologia Platonica* ist wohl die Art und Weise, wie er die intellectuelle Erkenntnis des Menschen weil er hierin den späteren Ontologismus bereits nach seiner granzen Tragweite anticipirt."

[25] See E. Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 186.

[26] See Gioberti-Alary, *op. cit.*, I, 13: "Ce qui assure à Malebranche un nom immortel dans les ânnales de la science, c'est la théorie de la vision idéale absolument opposée aux dogmes cartésiens; par elle il est le continuateur de la vraie science, et remonte jusqu'à Platon, par l'intermédiare de Saint Bonaventure, de Saint Augustin, et des Alexandrins."

This book had a great influence on the University of Louvain and in a short time ontologism became the official doctrine of most of the professors of theology and philosophy at that institute. According to J. Henry, *Le traditionalisme et l'ontologisme à l'université de Louvain,* Ubaghs, Lits, Laforet, Lefebvre, Labis, N. Nealler, Clarissens, and Baucquillion, were the principal ontologists during the period between 1846 to 1865.[27] The only outstanding representative of ontologism in Switzerland was Father Rothenflue, whose work was entitled *Institutiones philosophiae theoreticae.*[28]

In France ontologism was defended by Père Hugonin in his *Études philosophiques, ontologie ou études sur les lois de la pensée* (Paris, 1856-57). A formal repudiation of ontologism was signed by Hugonin before his elevation to the episcopacy.[29] The Abbé Jules Fabre filled in the vacancy left by Hugonin[30] but there is no evidence that he had to sign a refutation of ontologism in order to teach on the theological faculty of Paris.[31] Fabre published four works in favor of ontologism: a course in philosophy; a *Défense de l'ontologisme contre les attaques récentes de quelques écrivains qui se disent disciples de Saint Thomas* (Paris et Tournay, 1863); *Réponse aux lettres d'un sensualiste contre l'ontologisme* (Paris, 1864); and a re-edition of a work by Père André Martin on the philosophy of Saint Augustine.[32] Another French ontologist was Jean Sans-Fiel, who, according to Cardinal Zigliara, gives the clearest if not profoundest, exposition of ontologism.[33] His two works are *Discussion amicale sur l'ontologisme* (Paris et Nancy, 1865), and *De l'orthodoxie de l'ontologisme modéré et traditionnel, réponse au R. P. Kleutgen* (Paris et Nancy, 1869).

Branchereau, Superior of the Major Seminary of Nantes, out-

[27] See J. Henry, *Le traditionalisme et l'ontologisme à l'université de Louvain,* quoted by Fonck, "Ontologisme," *DTC,* XI, col. 1037.

[28] See *ibid.,* col. 1038.

[29] See Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. 318, footnote 1.

[30] See Fonck, *DTC,* XI, col. 1019.

[31] See *ibid., loc. cit.*

[32] See *ibid.,* XI, col. 1019.

[33] See Zigliara, *op. cit.,* I, 183: "Fra gli Ontologisti moderni quegli che, a mio avviso, espone se non con maggiore profondità, almeno con lucidezza maggiore l'Ontologismo, è l'Autore già da me citato più volte e che si piace darsi il nome di Jean Sans Fiel."

lined the doctrine of his *Praelectiones philosophiae* in fifteen propositions which were judged by the Holy Office to differ hardly at all from the condemnation of the 18th of September, 1861.[34] L'Abbé Caupert (professor of philosophy at the major seminary of Versailles), called himself, "ancien élève de l'école idéologiste de Louvain."[35] L'Abbé Blampignon (professor of logic at the major seminary of Troyes) published in 1862 an ontologistic study of Malebranche.[36] L'Abbe Chassay (professor of philosophy at the major seminary of Bayeux) was an ardent admirer of the Italian ontologist, Gioberti.[37] To complete the picture in France, Père Gratry's name should be mentioned. Although his *La connaissance de Dieu* did not profess ontologism properly so-called, nevertheless he was in the same stream of thought.[38]

In the nineteenth century ontologism was represented in Italy by Rosmini (1797-1855), Gioberti (1802-1852), and Mamiani (1799-1855). Gioberti refused to count Rosmini among the true ontologists and made him a simple psychologist.[39] However, Rosmini's *Nuovo saggio sull' origine delle idee* (1830), is definitely in the ontologist trend.[40] Among the forty propositions of Rosmini, condemned by the Holy See in 1887, several reveal the ontologistic tendencies of their author.[41] Vincenzo Gioberti is the classical representative of ontologism in the nineteenth century. His *Introduzione allo studio della filosofia* (1840) played an extremely important

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[34] See Lepidi, *op. cit.*, p. 316, footnote 2.

[35] See Fonck, *DTC*, XI, col. 1016.

[36] See *ibid.*, col. 1015.

[37] See *ibid.*, col. 1017.

[38] See *ibid.*, col. 1022.

[39] See Gioberti-Alary, *op. cit.*, II, 163: "Ce qui a induit en erreur un esprit aussi exact que celui de Rosimini, c'est l'emploi de la méthode purement psychologique."

[40] See E. Brehier, *Histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1942), II, 901: "On reconnait facilement dans la philosophie de Rosmini, un inspiration malebranchiste, qui continue en Italie celle du cardinal Gerdil."

[41] See *DB*, 1894: "Esse indeterminatum, quod procul dubio notum est omnibus intelligentiis, est Divinum illud, quod homini in natura manifestatur"; also *DB*, 1895: "Esse, quod homo intuetur, necesse est, ut sit aliquid entis necessarii et aeterni, causae creantis, determinantis ac finientis omnium entium contingentium, atque hoc est Deus."

role in the revival of ontologism in the nineteenth century.[42] Count Terenzio Mamiani della Rovere developed a system of ontologism which was not precisely that of Rosmini or Gioberti. He expounded it in *Dealoghi di scienza prima* (Paris, 1846) and in *Confessioni di un metaphysico.*[43] Francesco Milone wrote an enthusiastic eulogy of Jean Sans-Fiel's *La discussion amicale,* which was published in *La rivista universale* (1866-1867), under the title, *"Sopra un accusa contro l'ontologism nelle secuole cattoliche."*[44] Gaetano Milone, whom Zigliara calls "dotto ontologista"[45] defended ontologism in his *La scuola di filosofia razionale intitolata a S. Augostino* (Naples, 1861). In this work Father Milone attempted to show the harmony of his system with Saint Augustine.[46] Father Vercellone and Abate Francesco Seni accepted the position held by Father Gaetano Milone.[47]

It would be beyond the scope of this work to take up individually the authors enumerated in this brief historical survey of the rise and spread of ontologism in the nineteenth century. Whatever might be their accidental differences all these men present substantially the same reasons in defense of their position. So, on this basis, a selection of their principal arguments will be given and considered in the light of the *philosophia perennis.*

One of the first questions ontologism professes to solve is the nature of the interior light by which truth is manifested to the mind. Is it something created or uncreated? The proponents of ontologism unanimously assert that it is the Divine Light itself with no image interposed.[48] Their apparent scandal at the notion of an image existing between the knowing subject and the object known flows from a misunderstanding of the nature of the formal concept. They fail to see that the image expressed by cognition

[42] See Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. v: "Recentior iste Ontologismus initium sumpsit a Malebranchio: eum postea longo temporis intervallo intermissum, in lucem revocavit Vincentius Gioberti, quem plures in Italia, in Gallia, in hac Belgica regione, et alibi, quibusdam temperamentis adjectis, sequuti sunt."

[43] See Fonck, *DTC,* XI, col. 1033.

[44] See *ibid.,* col. 1034.

[45] See Zigliara, *op. cit.,* II, 382.

[46] See Fonck, *DTC,* XI, col. 1034.

[47] See *supra,* note 7.

[48] See Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. 19.

is the unique instance of a formal sign representing or manifesting something other than itself, i.e., that *in quo* and not that *ex quo* something is known.[49] Moreover, if their contention were true, then the created intellect should see God not only clearly and perfectly but also infinitely which is contrary to experience and philosophically absurd.[50]

An argument commonly adduced by the ontologists to sustain their position is drawn from the dependence of creatures on God not only *in essendo* but also *in operando*. The classic formulation of this argument may be found in the sixth chapter of the second part of the third book of Malebranche's, *Recherche de la vérité:* if something other than God were the intelligible light in virtue of which the mind sees truth, then the intellect would not be dependent on God in operation. This argument is false for two reasons. First, such dependence on God is impossible because the human intellect cannot naturally attain the Divine Light, as it is in itself. Secondly, the dependence of the created intellect on God is sufficiently safeguarded by the fact that both the objects which it knows and the light by which these objects are known depend on God as on the first efficient cause of all things.[51]

Whatever be the origin of our ideas, ontologists claim that they cannot be anything finite and created. For, if this were the case, how could that which is finite and contingent, i.e., created ideas, represent the infinite and the necessary, i.e., God? This objection confuses conformity or proportion *secundum esse entitativum* with conformity or proportion *secundum esse representativum*.[52] In order that one thing represent another it is not necessary that both have the same entity or perfection.[53] The conformity between the

[49] See J. Gredt, *Elementa philosophiae aristotelico-thomisticae* (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Herder & Co., 1937. 7th ed.), I, 2: "Sola imago cognitione expressa, i.e., conceptus formalis est signum formale, i.e., forma intentionalis, quae absque praevia notitia sui repraesentat aliud a se."

[50] See Lepidi, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-22.

[51] See *ibid.*, p. 32.

[52] See *ibid.*, p. 35.

[53] See Saint Thomas, *De ver.*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 9um: "Similitudo aliquorum duorum ad invicem potest dupliciter attendi. Uno modo secundum convenientiam in ipsa natura; et talis similitudo non requiritur inter cognoscens et cognitum; immo videmus quandoque quod, quanto talis similitudo est

representation of the thing and the thing represented is to be sought not as the ontologists claim *secundum rationem essendi* but only *secundum rationem representandi.* Although entitatively considered the idea is something finite and created, still it can represent the infinite and uncreated, but in a finite, not in an infinite manner.[54]

As a necessary consequence of their proposition that the Divine Light itself is the formal constituent of created intelligence, the ontologists claim for man, even in this life, an intuitive vision of God.[55] This proposition is the direct antithesis of the Thomistic conception of cognition.[56] As proof of their position, ontologists attempt to argue from God's omnipresence. God, they say, is immediately present, *secundum se,* to every created intellect. Whatever is immediately present to any intellect is immediately seen by that intellect. Therefore, God is the immediate object of the mind, even here on earth. It is true that God is everywhere present as the cause on which all things depend for their existence and by which they are conserved in existence but it does not follow that He is present to the created intellect *ratione objecti.* For something to be present to the mind as its object there must be some proportion between the subject knowing and the object known. No such proportion exists between the human intellect and God as He is in Himself.[57]

The ontologists claim to have another argument for the intuitive vision of God in the distinction between the inferior and the su-

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minor, tanto cognitio est perspicacior; sicut minor est similitudo similitudinis quae est in intellectu ad lapidem, quam illius quae est in sensu, cum sit a materia magis remota; et tamen intellectus perspicacius cognoscit quam sensus. Alio modo quantum ad repraesentationem: et haec similitudo requiritur cognoscentis ad cognitum."

[54] See Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. 58.

[55] See *ibid.,* p. 73.

[56] See Saint Thomas, *Sum. theol.,* I, q. 12, a. 4: "Cognitio enim contingit secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente. Cognitum autem est in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis. Unde cuiuslibet cognoscentis cognitio est secundum modum suae naturae. Si igitur modus essendi alicuius rei cognitae excedat modum naturae cognoscentis, oportet quod cognitio illius rei sit supra naturam illius cognoscentis."

[57] See Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. 96.

perior reason. The object of the inferior reason is created things. The object of the superior reason is divine things. Therefore, they claim, the mind immediately intuits the Divine things in themselves. But this does not follow, and for the reason assigned by Saint Thomas: the object of the superior reason is not the Divine Essence itself but *rationes quaedam a Deo in mente influentes, et a creaturis acceptae.*[58]

Another argument upon which the ontologists place great stress is drawn from the intelligible nature of things. The mind perceives the essence of things as something necessary, immutable, and eternal. Now what is necessary, immutable and eternal but God? Therefore God is the intelligible *ratio* of creatures. The solution of this objection rests upon the different ways in which the nature of created things can be considered. Considered as they actually exist *in rerum natura,* the natures of created things are not something necessary, immutable, and eternal but rather contingent, subject to change, and dependent on some cause for their existence. Considered insofar as they have existence in the subject knowing, i.e., as they have *esse cognitum,* the natures of created things are finite and contingent. But abstracting from their physical and mental existence, the natures of created things are necessary, immutable, and eternal. However, this species of necessity, immutability, and eternity is not to be confused with the necessity, immutability, and eternity of God. It follows from the fact that, abstracting from all contingency and mutability, the essence of created things cannot otherwise be conceived by the mind; and also because they are founded on the essence of God as the first rule and measure of all being and truth.[59]

The ontologists endeavor to sustain their position by arguing from the fact that both the human and the Divine intellects see the same intelligible *ratio,* as for example, the essence of a circle.

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[58] See Saint Thomas, *De ver.,* q. 18, a. 1, ad 9um: ". . . Superioris rationis objectum secundum conditionem naturae non est ipsa divina essentia; sed rationes quaedam a Deo in mente influentes, et a creaturis acceptae, quibus ad aeterna conspicienda perficimur."

[59] See Saint Thomas, *C. gent.,* II, 84: ". . . veritates intellectae fundentur in aliquo aeterno, fundantur autem in prima veritate, sicut in causa universali contentiva omnis veritatis."

The intelligible essence of a circle in the Divine Intellect is the Divine Essence itself. Therefore, the ontologists say, the essence of a circle, as the object of the created intellect, is also the Divine Essence. Again, the solution depends on making the proper distinctions. In this case, it is to be made between the essence of the thing which is the object of intelligence and the manner by which that essence is represented to either the Divine or human intellect. These two aspects are of primary importance. One presents the aspect of the term of the intellectual operation and is the thing itself which is known. The other presents the aspect of means by which the intellective faculty is formally illuminated and determined to know something. In the Divine intellect the thing is represented by the Essence of God. In the human intellect the thing is represented by some created similitude inhering in the soul. It is true then that both the Divine and human intellect see the same objective *ratio* but not in the same way.[60]

Ontologists predicate intelligibility only of God. Creatures, they say, are in themselves unintelligible. This proposition is diametrically opposed to the Thomistic analysis of reality. According to the *philosophia perennis,* every being, from the very fact that it is, is true, for *ens et verum convertuntur.* It follows then that just as every *verum* is intelligible, so likewise is every being, or creature. This is confirmed by the fact that what the mind conceives of existing things (for example, man is a rational animal, the whole is greater than the part) is really verified of things as they exist *in rerum natura.* These things are obviously something intelligible, and consequently it is false to maintain, as do the ontologists, that only God is intelligible.

Another essential element of ontologism is the insistence that the process of thought correspond exactly with the procession of things from the First Cause, i.e., the identity of the logical and ontological orders. They argue that since God is the *Primum ens* he must also be the *Primum Intelligible,* in which all things other than Himself are known. If this were true then God, as He is in Himself, would be the first object of the created intelligence and created things would be unintelligible in themselves. While it is

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[60] See Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. 124.

true that in the ontological order all things depend on God, it does not follow that knowledge of God is necessary for a knowledge of things. For just as creatures have their own entity so also they have their own truth and intelligibility. *Veritas enim et intelligibilitas rei est esse ipsius.*[61] Moreover, the *primum cognitum* is not *Esse Divinum* but *esse generalissimum* into which all other concepts are ultimately resolved.[62]

In support of their contention that the logical order must be identical with the ontological order the ontologists assume it to be a fact that the finite cannot be known without the infinite. According to them the finite is demonstrated by exclusion of infinite perfection. The mind must know the infinite before it can denominate something else as finite; therefore the finite cannot be known without a knowledge of the infinite. The flaw in this argument may be detected in the fact that it completely overlooks the various ways in which the finite can be known. First, the finite can be known as an entity without considering it as a limited entity. Such a knowledge in no wise demands previous cognition of the infinite. Second, a being can be known as finite and limited in comparison to some other thing which is finite and limited. Such knowledge, it is true, presupposes previous knowledge of a being endowed with greater perfection, but not necessarily with infinite perfection. For example, vegetative and sensitive life are readily conceived as limited and imperfect in comparison with rational life. Finally something can be denominated finite in comparison to something which is infinite. In this instance, because the mind compares the finite with the infinite, some knowledge of both is required.[63]

But even in this last instance knowledge of the infinite does not precede knowledge of the finite. As a matter of fact analysis of the idea the mind forms of God reveals the exact opposite of the ontologists' contentions. First, God is conceived by the mind

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[61] See *ibid.*, p. 130.

[62] See Saint Thomas, *Sum. theol.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2: "In his autem quae in apprehensione hominum cadunt quidam ordo invenitur. Nam illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione, est ens, cuius intellectus includitur in omnibus quaecumque quid apprehendit."

[63] See Lepidi, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

as an *Ens*. Second, all perfections: life, wisdom, goodness, etc., are predicated of this *Ens*. Third, the idea is then perfected by denying all limitations to the perfections as attributed to God. In other words, in the process of forming its idea of God the mind employs analogy, comparison, and negation. Before this can be done it must have knowledge of the finiteness of creatures. So before the mind can deny finiteness in God it must have previous knowledge of the finite. The mind must know the finite before it can know the infinite; not the infinite before the finite.[64]

By virtue of logical consistency ontologism contains within itself the seeds of dangerous and pernicious errors. Obviously both in word and in writing the ontologists themselves are the first to reject these errors but if their system is judged according to the nature of the principles they adopt, these consequences are inevitable. In the first place there is considerable confusion of the natural with the supernatural. The "natural vision" of God, no matter how its proponents try to explain it, attributes to man's natural powers that which is proper to them only when they are elevated by grace.[65] This "natural vision" of God leads ultimately to the error of the Beghards (condemned at the Council of Vienna in the year 1311), who maintained that our knowledge of God is natural and immediate, and as a result that any intellectual nature is naturally happy and the *lumen gloriae* is not required for the Beatific vision.[66] In addition, from the doctrine of the ontologists the very error which so many of them hoped to avoid, namely Pantheism, can be logically inferred.[67]

Despite all this the popularity of ontologism in the nineteenth century is an indubitable fact. The Church could not tolerate in her schools a doctrine of such a nature. So in retrospect, at least, the intervention of the Holy See can hardly be called surprising. On the 16th of September, 1861, seven propositions, which, with the exception of the seventh, contain the whole doctrine of ontolo-

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[64] See *ibid.*, p. 136.

[65] See Lepidi, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

[66] See *DB*, 475: "Quod quaelibet intellectualis natura in se ipsa naturaliter est beata, quodque anima indiget lumine gloriae, ipsum elevante ad Deum videndum et eo beatae fruendum."

[67] See Lepidi, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

gism, were condemned by the Holy Office with the note, *tuto tradi non potest.*

1) An immediate knowledge of God, at least habitual, is essential to the human intellect, in such wise that without this knowledge the mind can know nothing.

2) That being, which we know in all things and without which we know nothing, is the Divine Being.

3) Universals considered *a parte rei* are not really distinct from God.

4) The inborn knowledge we have of God as *Ens Simpliciter* involves in an eminent degree all other knowledge, in such wise that through it we know implicitly all being under whatever aspect it is knowable.

5) All other ideas are only modifications of the idea by which God is known as *ens simpliciter.*

6) Created things are in God as a part in a whole not as in a formal whole, but as in an infinite and most simple whole which places its "quasi parts" outside itself without any division or diminution.

7) Creation may be explained as follows: God by a special act, in virtue of which He knows and loves Himself as distinct from a determined creature, for example, from man, produces the creature.[68]

These propositions really contain the doctrine of ontologism. The doctrine contained in them can be reduced to three fundamental concepts. *First,* the human intellect knows God *in se,* i.e., through the medium of no creature. This is the obvious sense of the first proposition. *Second,* universals considered *a parte re* (objectively) are not contained in creatures which are contingent, but only in God (proposition five). Hence they are not really distinct from God (proposition three). Therefore created things, not according to their contingent existence, but according to their necessary and immutable essence, not only exist in God as *entia possibilia* in their

[68] *DB,* 1659-1665.

fundamentum, but also exist in Him, from whom they are not really distinct, according to their own *esse objectivum.* Hence created things are in God as in an infinitely simple whole (proposition six). *Third,* if God (inasmuch as it is asserted in the above mentioned propositions) is known by the human intellect through the medium of no creature, and if universals, which are the proper object of intellectual cognition, exist in Him alone, it clearly follows that God is *lumen intellectuale* (proposition one), without which we know nothing (proposition two). Hence in the idea of God, *nobis naturaliter congenita,* all other knowledge is involved in an eminent degree, and in that knowledge in some way all other things are implicitly known (proposition four).

These three fundamental concepts are expressly taught by the ontologists.[69] Therefore since these propositions cannot be safely taught, it follows that ontologism comes under the same condemnation.[70] However, as soon as these propositions appeared the ontologists claimed that it was not their system but pantheism that the Holy See had in mind. To analyze the intrinsic arguments adduced by the ontologists to sustain their assertion would be beyond the scope of this work. All these arguments and distinctions, according to Father Lepidi, serve only to distort and twist the otherwise obvious meaning of the propositions.[71] This is likewise the conclusion reached by Cardinal Zigliara. The learned Cardinal considered the first proposition condemned by the Holy See the fundamental teaching of ontologism. On this basis he maintained that it was not pantheism but so-called *ontologismo moderato* that was condemned by the Holy See.[72] Finally, if the obvious sense of the propositions was to condemn pantheism, as the ontologists claimed, then surely the note attached to the propositions would have been much less benign than *"tuto tradi non possunt."*

Besides the intrinsic argument, the ontologists offered an ex-

[69] See Lepidi, *op. cit.,* pp. 1-14.

[70] See *ibid.,* p. 314.

[71] See *ibid.,* p. 315.

[72] Zigliara, *op. cit.,* II, 159: "ora appunto questa conoscenza immediata (soggettiva) che in quanto si termina a Dio (oggettivo) è detta lume intellettuale nella prima proposizione, è censurata siccome *non sicura* dal santo tribunale della romana Inquisizione, e però l'ontologismo così detto moderato è colpito da quella censura."

trinsic one in support of their contention that these seven propositions referred to pantheism and not ontologism. A controversy arose in France as to the exact sense of the condemnation of the Holy Office. So the Bishop of Nantes asked the Archbishop of Tours (Monsignor Guibert), on the occasion of the latter's departure for Rome, to ascertain the mind of the Holy See on the matter. When the Archbishop returned to Tours he wrote a letter, dated the 13th of March, 1862, to the Bishop of Nantes in which he said:

> I asked a great number of prelates well instructed and very competent in questions of this kind, especially those who were in a position to know the object of the judgment which was given. All expressed to me the conviction that the intention of the Pope and the Holy See was not to touch on the opinion taught in the schools and known under the name of ontologism. It is Pantheism that they had in mind, and wished to condemn as you thought all along.[73]

In 1863, P. Antonio M. da Rignano, published under the title *Principio protologico dell' umana intelligenza, o il vero concetto dell' itenerarium mentis ad Deum di san Bonaventure,* lectures which he had given at the Academia Tiberina in Rome.[74] Moreover, on the 27th of August, the same year, the Barnabite Father Vercellone published a dissertation on the *Dottrine filosofiche di sant' Agostino,* which he had previously read before a select and learned audience at the Academia di Religione Cattolica, in Rome.[75]

To these facts the ontologists give the following interpretation. The letter of Archbishop Guibert of Tours was written after the condemnation of the seven propositions. The work of Fathers

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[73] *Ibid.,* II, 156: "Ho interrogato gran numero di prelati i più istruiti ed i più competenti su queste materie, coloro in ispecie che erano più in grado di conoscere l'ojjetto del giudizio che è stato portato. Tutti mi hanno espresso la convinzione che l'intenzione del Papa e della sacra Congregazione non è stata punto di toccare alle opinioni insegnate nelle scuole e conosciute il nome d'Ontologismo. E il Panteismo che si e avuto di mira e che si è voluto colpire, cosi come voi lo avevate subito pensato."

[74] See *ibid.,* II, 156.

[75] See *ibid.,* II, 156.

Rignano and Vercellone expounded a system which was supposedly contained in the seven propositions but they received no censure. So the ontologists conclude, according to Father Zigliara, "That these and similar facts show that moderate ontologism has nothing to do with the propositions censured as unsafe by the Holy See."[76]

A much more impressive array of facts and a sounder interpretation of the facts can be marshalled against the position sustained by the ontologists. In the first place not all the proponents of ontologism adopted the line of reasoning just mentioned. As a matter of fact, from the beginning, many of them realized that their teaching was identical with the doctrine condemned by the Holy See. "Of many of them at least we are able to affirm this as a fact and affirm it with certainty."[77]

Besides this general observation there are three very significant facts to be taken into consideration. In the year 1862 Père Branchereau was considering publishing a new edition of his work, *Praelectiones philosophiae*. He was most anxious to ascertain the relation of his teaching to the seven propositions, already condemned by the Holy Office. For this reason he summarized his doctrine in the following fifteen propositions, and submitted them to the Holy See for examination.

1) In thought two things are essentially distinct, a knowing subject and an object known.

2) The object known is again distinguished into *ens simpliciter* and *ens secundum quid*.

3) By *ens simpliciter* we understand real, concrete, and infinitely perfect being, therefore, essentially distinct from being in general which is nothing else but an abstraction of the mind: In a word *ens simpliciter* is God.

4) *Ens simpliciter* is necessarily existent, but *entia secun-*

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[76] *Ibid.*, II, 157: "Questi e altri consimili fatti, dicono gli Ontologisti, mostrano ad evidenza che l'Ontologismo moderato non ha nulla che fare con le proposizioni censurate come poco sicure dalla sacra Congregazione."

[77] *Ibid.*, II, 159: "De molti almeno, dica il Kleutgen noi possiamo affermare un tal fatto ed affermarlo con sicurezza."

dum quid may be considered either in a state of existence or in a state of mere possibility.

5) Considered in their state of possibility *entia secundum quid* are something eternal and necessary; considered in their state of present existence they are something temporal and contingent.

6) The eternal and necessary reality of beings considered as possible must be contained in necessary being, that is, in God, since this reality does not exist in itself. This reality is called the metaphysical essence.

7) Essence therefore cannot be anything else than divine ideas, or archetypes according to which God creates all things.

8) Metaphysical essences, which can be concreted in an indefinite number of individuals, constitute the objective reality of universal ideas.

9) The act of concreting these essences is effected through creation, in which God makes any being pass from possibility to existence, not however by communication of His Being to it but by drawing it from nothing according to the archetype contained in His mind.

10) Created beings therefore can in no sense whatever be called God, nor be said to contain something of the Divine being in them.

11) Insofar as they affect the mind in an intellectual way, realities are called ideas; hence ideas are something objective considered in their relation to our intellect; the process by which we apprehend these ideas is called ideal perception.

12) From the first instance of its existence the mind is endowed with this power of ideal perception, not indeed in a reflex manner but directly.

13) Among the intelligible truths which we apprehend ideally, God occupies the first place. Although our apprehension of Him is essentially different from that

of the intuition of the blessed it does not terminate in an image representative of Him but terminates in Himself.

14) We apprehend the metaphysical essence of things which are known by us in the divine intellect; the fact of their being concreted is known to us through the creative act proper to God alone.

15) We apprehend ideally created things neither in God nor in themselves. Knowledge of them is obtained in this way: 1. We know our soul through an inner sense, or through conscience. 2. We know created things, which are distinct from the soul, through an invincible judgment founded on the divine veracity in which we affirm that a certain essence has been concreted through creation.[78]

Toward the end of September, 1862, the Bishop of Nantes received a letter from Cardinal Patrizi in which the Secretary of the Holy Office stated that the propositions submitted to him fell under the condemnation of the Holy See, since they differed only slightly from the seven propositions already improbated and hence could not be taught.[79]

Another important fact is the final judgment on the writings of Professor Ubaghs. It was pronounced on the 21st of February, 1866 and officially communicated by a Letter of the Secretary of the Holy Office, Cardinal Patrizi, to the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines. In this letter it was said that the works of Ubaghs ought to be excluded from the schools because they expounded a doctrine very similar to the seven propositions already condemned in 1861. This final judgment on the work of Ubaghs was decreed by the joint session of the Holy Office and The Sacred Inquisition and was expressly approved and confirmed by the Holy Father. Here again is proof positive that it was not pantheism, as Ubaghs thought, but rather the very ontologism diffused by his own work,

[78] Lepidi, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

[79] *Ibid., loc. cit.*, "Or, à la fin de septembre 1862 Mgr. l'évêque de Nantes reçut une lettre du Cardinal Patrizi dans laquelle le secrétaire du Saint-Office disait que les propositions soumises differant à peine des sept précédément improuvées, tombaient sous la même improbation; qu'en conséquence elles ne pouvaient être enseignées."

which the Holy See decreed could not be taught with a sincere conscience.[80]

Finally to the two preceding facts can be added a third. In the year 1866 Père Hugonin was proposed by the French Government as an acceptable candidate for the Bishopric of Bayeux. Before his elevation to the episcopacy Hugonin signed a formal retraction of the ontologism taught in his *Etudes philosophiques-ontologie.*

> Since I, the undersigned, have been informed by the Most Reverend Apostolic Nuntio to France, that the doctrine which I have expounded in my philosophical work on ontologism (Etudes philosophique-ontologie) has been improbated by the Holy See, inasmuch as it particularly favors, either explicitly or implicitly, those propositions which the Holy See has judged cannot be safely taught: I, without any delay, freely and spontaneously, declare that I disapprove the aforesaid teaching, in the same sense as the Holy See, as departing more or less from the principles of sound philosophy, and at the same time, I promise, as far as I am able, to take care lest it be any longer taught in the schools.[81]

An excellent appraisal of these facts is given by Cardinal Zigliara:

> The letter of Cardinal Guibert is anterior to the letter of Cardinal Patrizi announcing the censure made against

[80] Zigliara, *op. cit.,* II, 161: "Qui dunque noi abbiamo di nuovo una prova autentica, del non essere il Panteismo, come opinova L'Ubaghs: ma bensì L'Ontologismo da lui difeso, quello di cui il santo tribunale dichiarò non potersi con sicura coscienza insegnare."

[81] Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. 318, note 1: "Cum ego infrascriptus ob Essimo, et Rssimo. Dno. Archiepiscopo Myrensi, Nuntio Apostolico in Gallia, acceperim, doctrinam quam in meo opere philosophico super Ontologismum (Etudes philosophique-Ontologie) exposui, a S. Romana Sede improbari, utpote quae praesertim sive explicite sive implicite illis propositionibus faveat, quas S. R. et universalis Inquisitionis Congregatio anno 1861 tuto tradi non posse decrevit: Ego ipse nulla interposita mora libere ac sponte declaro me praedictam doctrinam eodem prorsus modo a S. Sedes censuit, uti a sanis Philosophiae principiis plus minusve aberrantem tenere et improbare, simulque promitto me, quantum in me erit, in posterum curaturum, ne amplius in scholis tradatur. Datum Parisiis die 13 Octobris 1866, H. Hugonin, Pretre."

> the ontologistic theory of Branchereau, it is also anterior to the censure brought against Ubaghs, it is anterior, finally, to the retraction of Hugonin. For that reason, whatever may be the value of the information contained in it, that letter cannot diminish the importance of the subsequent facts. The same may be said regarding the dissertations of Monsignor da Rignano and Father Vercellone (1863). Moreover, even though these works might have been published after the censure of the Congregation, this would prove nothing: because it would be necessary to prove that these works had been denounced either to the Index or to the Holy Office and that after mature examination both the one and the other Congregation should have judged them immune from all censure. Now this precisely cannot be proven and therefore these facts do not prove that moderate ontologism has received no censure as Fabre so confidently believes.[82]

Ontologism was by no means neglected by the Vatican Council. The use of the word *certo* in the second chapter of the Constitution *Dei Filius*[83] appears to be a definite condemnation of Kantianism, Traditionalism and Fideism.[84] But this is not the case either in regard to the ontological argument of Saint Anselm,[85] nor in

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[82] "La lettera del Cardinale Guibert è anteriore alla lettera del Cardinale Patrizi annunziante la censura portata contro le teorie ontologistiche del Branchereau, anteriore alla censura portata contro Ubaghs, anteriore finalmente alla ritrattazione dell'Hugonin. Per la qual cosa, checchè ne sia delle informazioni, prese, quella lettera non può menomare l'importanza dei susseguenti fatti. Dicasi lo stesso riguardo alle dissertazioni di monsignor da Rignano e del P. Vercellone (1863). E poi, quando pure fossero state pubblicate queste opere posteriormente alla censura della Congregazione, questo fatto nulla proverebbe: imperrocchè converrebbe provare che siffatte opere sieno state denunziate o all'Indice o al Sant'Uffizio, e che dopo maturo esame l'une e l'altra Congregazione le abbiano giudicate immuni da ogni censura. Ora ciò appunto non può provarsi, e però questi fatti non provano che l'Ontologismo moderato non abbia ricevuta alcuna ferita, come si esprime troppo confidentemente il Fabre, . . ." Zigliara, *op. cit.*, II, 164.

[83] *DB*, 1785.

[84] See Garrigou-Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[85] See J. Vacant, *Etudes théologiques sur les constitutions du concile du Vatican* (Paris: Delhomme et Briguet, 1895), I, 658. The spokesman of the *Deputatio de Fide* said: "Quis enim nostrum, cum hanc doctrinam, quae a

regard to the Cartesian theory of innate ideas.[86] At first sight it would seem that the Council extended to ontologism the same degree of toleration that it gave to Cartesianism because ontologism differs from Cartesianism by hardly more than a point.[87] However this point marks the difference between the natural and the supernatural. For ontologism attributes to reason not only innate ideas but an immediate vision of God and hence it confuses the natural knowledge of God proper to wayfarers with the supernatural vision of God proper to the elect in Heaven. It was principally for this reason that the Holy Office condemned ontologism.[88]

The Vatican Council could hardly be expected to remain silent or indifferent to the contemporaneous error of ontologism in regard to the natural knowledge of God. As a matter of fact two amendments were proposed to meet this question. The first asked for the refutation of ontologism at the beginning of the second chapter;[89] the second sought its condemnation by an anathema in

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nobis proponitur, suo suffragio confirmaverit, quis putat ea damnare argumentum illud celeberrimum ontologicum s. Anselmi, quidquid hoc de argumento sentiat?"

[86] See Garrigou-Lagrange, *op. cit.*, pp. 25 and 26.

[87] J. Vacant, *op. cit.*, I, 298: "Or, cette théorie [ontologism] ne diffère guère de l'innéisme des cartésiens, que par un seul point. L'ontologisme remplace l'idée innée de Dieu, que les cartésiens nous attribuent, par une vue de Dieu, que joue absolument le même rôle. Il pouvait donc sembler que respecter l'innéisme, c'était, de la part du Concile, tolérer l'ontologisme. Cependant la différence que nous venons de signaler entre les deux théories est capitale aux yeux de la foi; car en attribuant à la raison, non pas seulement une notion innée, mais une vue immédiate et continuelle de Dieu, l'ontologisme confond notre connaissance du Créateur, avec la vision intuitive et surnaturelle qui fait le bonheur des élus dans la gloire du ciel."

[88] See Vacant, *op. cit.*, I, 299: "C'est pour ce motif principalement, que, le 18 septembre 1861, le Saint Office avait condamné sept propositions, qui resummaient la doctrine de l'ontologisme."

[89] The emendation proposed was the following: "Eadem Sancta Mater Ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum rerum omnium principium et finem, licet lumen inhabitet inaccessibilem, eumque nullus hominum unquam viderit, sed nec videre possit, non solum facie ad faciem, quod solis in coelo beatis concessum est, sed nec simplici mentis nostrae intuitu, dum peregrinamur in corpore, naturaliter videri ac contemplari liceat: tamen per speculum et in aenigmate, naturali scilicet lumine rationis per res creatas veluti per gradus ad illum ascendendo, eius existentiam, praecipuasque illius perfectiones certo cognosci

an additional canon.[90] But the *Deputatio de Fide,* through its spokesman Bishop Gasser, recommended the rejection of both amendments for the sole reason that the gravity of the question demanded that ontologism be submitted as a problem to be studied in the Council.[91]

The Fathers of the Council accepted the recommendation of the *Deputatio de Fide* and rejected the amendments. In order to bring up the question of ontologism for counciliar discussion Cardinals Riario Sforza and Pecci presented a *postulatum* in which they asked for the condemnation of this proposition, *Naturalis est homini cognitio Dei immediata et directa.*[92] Unfortunately the Council broke up before it had time to consider this *postulatum.* However the condemnation of ontologism falls within the ambit of the Council's admonition that all men adhere to those constitutions

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posse, cum dicat Apostolus: Invisibilia ipsius a creatura mundi per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur. Quod cum immensae bonitati suae et infinitae sapientiae non satis tamen fuisset, placuit ei etiam alia supernaturali via seipsum et investigabilia sapientiae suae secreta revelare, et voluntates suas non solum filiis Isreal, sed toti humano generi notas facere, multifariam multisque modis olim loquendo patribus in prophetis, novissime vero nobis in Filio." Vacant, *op. cit.,* I, 646.

[90] The proposed canon was "Si quis dixerit, Deum per immediatam visionem seu intuitum in hac vita naturalibus viribus percipi posse, aut in illo omnia directe videri et contemplari; anathema sit." Vacant, *op. cit.,* I, 654.

[91] "Iam haec emendatio non potest admitti ex opinione Deputationis fidei, et quidem iam ex ea formali ratione, quia gravissimum hoc systema ontologismi non potest sic quasi accidentaliter et incidenter pertractari; sed pro gravitate materiae debet Concilio proponi, et debet deinde conciliariter tractari. Inde Deputatio fidei exoptat, quod haec emendatio hic loci non approbetur; sed simul etiam dicit, quod exinde nullum praeiudicium debeat enasci quoad ipsum systema ontologismi, sed quod res maneat in pristino suo statu, et hic tractatus de ontologismo solummodo ex causa formali hic sit omissus." Vacant, *op. cit.,* I, 655,

"Iste canon contra ontologistas est: . . . Etiam haec emendatio non approbanda censetur a Deputatione fidei, et quidem ideo, quia doctrina ista ex heri dictis conciliariter non fuit pertracta; et cum sit tanti momenti, in quo verum a falso forsan latum crinem distat, ideo certe res ista serio et conciliariter esset ponderanda: et ex hoc defectu formali solummodo Deputatio de fide censet, istum canonem non esse approbandum." Vacant, *op. cit.,* I, 676.

[92] See Vacant, *op. cit.,* I, 300.

which proscribe doctrines not specifically mentioned in the text of the Council itself.[93]

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[93] "Quoniam vero satis non est, haereticam pravitatem devitare, nisi ii quoque errores diligenter fugiantur, qui ad illam plus minusve accedunt; omnes officii monemus, servandi etiam Constitutiones et Decreta, quibus pravae eiusmodi opiniones, quae istic diserte non enumerantur, ab hac Sancta Sede proscriptae et prohibitae sunt." *Constitutio de fide catholica, ASS,* V (1869), 471.

CHAPTER V

Brownson and Ontologism

At one time in his career Brownson was an ontologist. There is no need to belabor this point as he himself admitted it. In his article, *Ontologism and Psychologism,* he states, ". . . ontologist he is not, and never has been since he became a Catholic."[1] Further on in the same article he asserts, "we, moreover, have never, since we abjured Protestantism and professed to be a Catholic, fallen into the error of the exclusive or improbated ontologists, . . ."[2] In another place, speaking of the nature of necessary and immutable truths, he affirms that, "Leibnitz and Pierre Leroux recognized them, but failed to vindicate them, for they both held the doctrine, censured by the Holy See in the Louvain professors, that the soul, by its own action, intuitively perceives or apprehends the ideal, as we ourselves did with them before our conversion but never since."[3]

On the strength of these admissions one ardent defender of Brownson's orthodoxy has written an interesting thesis in which he states that if the distinction between Brownson's philosophical views before and after he entered the Church be borne in mind, "it becomes equally possible to cull from his writings passages of an ontological bearing and others of anti-ontological character."[4] He is of the opinion that authors such as: Fonck, Sauvage, Preuss, Healy, fail to make this distinction, or if they do make it, conclude rather apodictically that Brownson was tainted with ontologism both before and after his conversion.[5] While it is true that "we should not allow ourselves to be guided exclusively by statements of this kind,"[6] still it seems equally true that an investigation of

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[1] "Ontologism and Psychologism" (1874), *Works,* II, 472.

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 479.

[3] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 501.

[4] S. Raemers, *America's Foremost Philosopher* (Washington, D. C.: St. Anselm's Priory, 1931), p. 28.

[5] See Raemers, *op. cit.,* p. 30.

[6] *Ibid., loc. cit.*

the charge of ontologism leveled against Brownson ought not to begin by assuming what has to be proved, namely, that Brownson was not an ontologist after his conversion. For the mere fact that Brownson admitted he was an ontologist before his conversion does not prove that he was not one after his conversion.

In the opinion of the writer of this study Brownson's system bears unmistakable resemblance to ontologism and, insofar as it does, it cannot be safely taught. To substantiate this claim two arguments will be adduced; one extrinsic, the other intrinsic. The extrinsic argument will show that Brownson frequently quoted authors without seeming to be aware that they were ontologists. This argument is not intended to prove definitely that Brownson was an ontologist. But it does have a presumptive force which is not without value. If Brownson did not always recognize ontologism when he saw it, the presumption could be that he was not always aware of it in his own writings. The intrinsic argument will show that many of Brownson's fundamental propositions can be either reduced to ontologism, or, are distinctly ontologistic in themselves.

Some mention has already been made of authors on whom Brownson lavished extravagant praise. It is worthy of note that many of them were ontologists. Amongst these should be numbered Père Malebranche. According to Brownson, Malebranche is not to be considered a Cartesian.[7] As a matter of fact he is so classified by several histories of philosophy.[8] Brownson was of the opinion that Malebranche rightly maintained that the mind sees all things in God.[9] Although he insisted that Malebranche's theory of vision in God cannot be accepted, still he claimed that it revived a great truth which the prevalence of peripateticism had caused to be forgotten.[10] Brownson believed that Malebranche had "proved clearly that existences are not intelligible in themselves, or anywhere

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[7] "Maret on Reason and Revelation" (1857), *Works,* I, 440.

[8] See A. Stockl, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kircheim, 1870), p. 604; see also W. Turner, *History of Philosophy* (New York: Ginn & Company, 1903), p. 601.

[9] See "The Existence of God" (1852), *Works,* I, 269.

[10] See "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 409-410.

save in God."[11] This is one of the fundamental propositions of ontologism,[12] which Brownson was supposed to have repudiated after his conversion.

Brownson regretted the fact that "The best metaphysical mind in France was obliged to suppress the best part of his *Praelectiones Philosophicae,* because, forsooth, it was not in harmony with the prejudices of the Superior of the Sulpician Congregation to which he belonged."[13] This best metaphysical mind belonged to Father Branchereau, Superior of the Major Seminary of Nantes. Father Branchereau did not have the same confidence as Brownson in the "best part of his *Praelectiones Philosophiae.*" For this reason he submitted his teaching in the form of fifteen propositions to the Holy See. The reply of the Holy Office was that these propositions differed only slightly from the seven propositions already reprobated and that they could not be safely taught. The decision of the Holy Office vindicated the "prejudice" of the Superior of the Sulpician Congregation. This seems to be an instance of an author whom Brownson failed to recognize as an ontologist.

According to Brownson, Cardinal Gerdil was the able defender of Malebranche and the most genuine philosopher of the eighteenth century.[14] The work in which Gerdil ably defended Malebranche was the *Défense du sentiment du Père Malebranche sur l'orgine et la nature des idées contre l'examen de Locke.* It was precisely this work which made Gerdil the outstanding representative of ontologism in the eighteenth century. In it he attempted to prove that ideas are God. In the process of so doing he tried to show that essentially Saint Thomas said the same thing. Brownson unhesitatingly accepted the line of reasoning followed by Gerdil, seemingly unaware that the whole process was ontologistic:

> That we see all in the idea is, we believe, true, but the idea is not the representative of the object in the intelligible order, but the object itself,—is in fact, in the order of intelligibles, as St. Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Bona-

[11] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 263.

[12] See A. Lepidi, *Examen philosophico-theologicum de ontologismo* (Louvain: J. Fonteyn, 1874), p. 124.

[13] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 496-497.

[14] See "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 248.

> ventura, Malebranche, Leibnitz, and Cardinal Gerdil teach, God himself. We say St. Thomas, for though he has the air of holding the contrary, and usually adopts the peripatetic forms of expression, his principles, as Cardinal Gerdil has shown in his *Defence of Pere Malebranche against Locke,* are not only not opposed to it, but do in reality apply to it.[15]

Two of the most distinguished opponents of ontologism have taken a great deal of care to indicate the ontologistic implications of Gerdil's work and to expose the completely unscientific character of his use of Saint Thomas. Their conclusion is that not only does Saint Thomas have *the air* of asserting the contrary but that his thought is actually the opposite of Gerdil's interpretation and in reality in no way implies it.[16]

No name appears more frequently in Brownson's philosophical writings than that of Gioberti. Besides four articles devoted exclusively to an exposition of Gioberti's philosophy[17] there is hardly an article in Brownson's philosophical writings which does not make some reference to him. It is a rather striking paradox that Brownson, who was obsessed with the idea of refuting Pantheism, should have constructed his reasoning around a formula borrowed from an Italian pantheist. Even as late as 1873 Brownson was of the opinion that Gioberti did not understand the formula *ens creat existentias* in a pantheistic sense, "We have no call to defend Gioberti, who, for aught we know, may have understood the ideal formula in a pantheistic sense, but we do not believe he did, and we know that we do not."[18]

Brownson's indignation at the charge of ontologism leveled against his use of the formula apparently prevented him from considering seriously another formidable objection to it. He contended that until the appearance of the formula, philosophy was

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[15] "Bushnell's Discourses" (1949), *Works,* VII, 47.

[16] See Lepidi, *op. cit.,* pp. 257-274; also Zigliara, *op. cit.,* pp. 163-274.

[17] See "Vincenzo Gioberti" (1850), *Works,* II, 101; see also "The Philosophy of Revelation" (1861), *Works,* II, 140; "The Philosophy of Religion" (1861), *Works,* II, 182; and "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 211.

[18] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 66.

not and could not be a science.[19] Such a claim is rather sweeping, and it does not seem unreasonable to ask that Brownson prove his assertion. But proof is precisely what he failed to give. According to him, the principle of philosophy, i.e., the formula *ens creat existentias*, is a divine judgment, not a human judgment.[20] But philosophy, if anything, is human knowledge. And science taken as an act, a habit, or a system, is the product of the human mind.

But assuming that this ideal judgment *ens creat existentias* is God's judgment, what is the *nexus* between the *divine judgment* and the *human judgment?* Brownson was aware of the importance of this question and expressed it in these words:

> We have found the copula of the Divine judgment; it is the creative act of Being placing existences *ad extra.* The copula of the human judgment is the reverberation of the copula of the Divine judgment, or imitation of it by us as second causes. But what is the *nexus* or copula which binds the human judgment to the Divine, that is, the intelligible and the intellective?[21]

According to Brownson, the *nexus* is not the creative act of being, for that would imply pantheism,[22] nor is it the *intellectus agens* of the schoolmen for that is pure Fichteism.[23] He finds the solution to the problem in the following fashion:

> . . . in regarding thought as the joint product of both the intelligible and the intellect, and therefore that cognition, formally the act of the mind as second cause, is yet produced only by the active cooperation or concurrence of the intelligible, as is the case with every act of second causes. It is not the *intellectus agens* that renders the intelligible intelligible *in actu,* as the Scholastics teach, but the intelligible is itself by its own light intelligible *in actu,* and it is the concurrence of its intelligibility *in actu* with our own intellective faculty that forms the intuition. As the intelligible concurs only through its creative act, the

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[19] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 418.
[20] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 66.
[21] Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 303.
[22] See *ibid.,* p. 304.
[23] See *ibid.,* p. 304.

> creative act of God as the objectively concurring force of thought unites our cognition to the Divine judgment, as it does ourselves as existence to the Divine Essence. In this connection of our judgment with the Divine judgment lies the explanation of all thought and of all reasoning, as well as the truthfulness of our cognitions.[24]

Obviously this connection is not an object of experience either external or internal. Hence it must be demonstrated before the contention that the formula *ens creat existentias* can be considered the principle of all sound philosophy. But Brownson admitted that he was unequal to the task:

> The explanation of this connection itself, which involves the whole mystery of knowledge and of the whole activity of second causes, we shall not by any means attempt, for if it does not surpass the powers of the human mind, it most assuredly surpasses ours.[25]

Instead of proving his contention that the formula is the principle of all sound philosophy Brownson admitted that the connection between the *divine judgment* and *human judgment* was indemonstrable. When faced with the problem of explaining how the human judgment is a reverberation of the divine judgment Brownson seeks refuge in a sort of epistemological agnosticism. So, even abstracting from the question as to whether Brownson's use of the formula *ens creat existentias* is ontologistic it must be rejected as being a purely arbitrary device. And inasmuch as Brownson did not demonstrate the connection between this divine judgment and the human judgment, his contention that this formula is the principle of philosophy can hardly be seriously considered.

So much for the extrinsic argument. It does not prove that Brownson was an ontologist. However it clearly shows that even after his conversion, Brownson failed to recognize ontologism when he saw it. Hence, the presumption, if any, would seem to be against him rather than for him. Attention will now be given to the intrinsic argument.

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 304.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 304.

It would seem as though Brownson's use of the analogy of light cannot be completely absolved from the charge of ontologism. The application of *vision* and *light* to spiritual realities is a common phenomenon in the writings of philosophers and theologians. A slight acquaintance with traditional philosophy and theology is sufficient to bring one into contact with such terms as: *visio oculi, visio mentis, visio abstractiva, visio intuitiva, visio comprehensiva,* and their correlatives; *lumen oculi, lumen rationis, lumen gratiae, lumen fidei, lumen gloriae.* It is not surprising then to find this analogy frequently occurring in Brownson's writings. Obviously the terms of this analogy must be employed with extreme accuracy lest perhaps serious errors result from lack of due precision. This accuracy is not always manifested in Brownson's use of the analogy and in many instances he seems to employ it in an ontologistic sense. For this reason it seems expedient, before examining Brownson's use of the analogy of light, to make a scholastic digression on the exact sense in which the terms vision and sight are employed to designate spiritual realities.

The verb *to see* is used to designate the action of faculties essentially distinct; the physical faculty of sight and the intellectual faculty of knowing. The generic reason for predicating sight of these essentially different faculties is to be sought in the very condition of the human intellect which is a faculty of a soul united to an organic body. Because of this condition intellectual development follows the development of the senses and the mind rises to the knowledge of spiritual objects through the knowledge of sensible realities. This also explains why the concepts employed to express spiritual realities are drawn from the analogies of corporeal and sense realities. It is for this reason that language, the material and sensible expression of thought, is filled with terms of the same analogies.[26]

The specific reason for predicating sight of these essentially different faculties is to be sought in the fact that the resemblances

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[26] See Saint Thomas, *C. gent.,* III, 53: "Quia vero in cognitionem intelligibilium ex sensibilibus pervenimus, etiam sensibilis cognitionis nomina ad intelligibilem cognitionem transumimus: et praecipue quae pertinent ad visum. . . ."

between the sensible and the spiritual are more evident in the sense of sight than in the other external senses, for the sense of sight is more "noble" than the others and has more affinity with the intellective faculty.[27] It is not difficult to assign the intrinsic reason of this fact. In the other external senses the sensible object comes physically in contact with the organ of sensation, but in the sense of sight contact is effected by the image or similitude of the visible object impressed upon the eye by the medium of light. This image or similitude is not the object seen, but the means and the condition necessary to see the object which is outside the sense. Now it is precisely this way of knowing, by means of species, forms, images, similitudes, which is the principal basis of the analogy which passes from the vision of sense to that of the mind.

As the sense of sight in order to see has need of the visible species of the sensible object, so does the mind in order to know have need of species, or spiritual forms of the intelligible object. The manner in which the sense of sight sees, says Saint Thomas, consists in this, that the visible species is actually formed in the sense of vision by the light; whence, transferring the name of vision to the intellect, the mind sees by knowing, when by the intellectual light the intellectual form is produced in the mind.[28]

Now, in order to have sense vision three things are required: the faculty of sight directed towards the object, the visible object, and the light as a medium. The same *proportionately* can be said of intellective vision. Irrational creatures are obviously unable to see intellectually. Intellectual creatures themselves are able to see only when the intelligible object is presented to their intelligence. The intelligible is not presented to the intelligence unless it is manifested, i.e. unless it is illumined, since to be illumined and to

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[27] See Saint Thomas, *ibid., loc. cit.*: ". . . inter ceteros sensus nobilior est visus et spiritualior, ac per hoc intellectui affinior; et inde est quod ipsa intellectualis cognitio visio nominatur."

[28] *In III Sent.*, d. XXIV, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1m: "Modus autem quo sensus [visus] videt, est inquantum species visibilis in actu per lumen formatur in visu; unde transferendo nomen visionis ad intellectum, proprie intelligendo videmus, quando per lumen intellectuale ipsa forma intellectualis fit in intellectu nostro."

be manifested are synonymous.[29] Now in the vision of the mind, or in the exercise of the intellective faculty, there exists a light (whatever its nature may be) certainly not similar in substance to corporeal light, but similar in effects. For, as the corporeal light manifests both itself and the world of sense reality to the sense, so the intellective light manifests to the mind both itself and the intelligible world of truth.

Light is that which manifests anything according to the faculty of vision. In an extended sense it signifies a manifestation in the order of knowledge. Taken in its original signification, light cannot be applied to spiritual things, except in a metaphorical sense. But taken in a more extended sense, as a principle of manifestation, the word light is more properly applied to the intellect than to the sense.[30] However in speaking of sensible and intelligible *light,* it is important to keep in mind that the metaphor is not drawn from the formal *ratio* of light, as a sensible quality; but from a definition taken from the effect of light, as any manifestation in the order of knowledge. Since the formal *ratio* of light is applied properly only to sensible light, the metaphor drawn from the *effect* of light reveals nothing about the *nature* of the *lumen rationis.* The analogy is based upon a relation of effects rather than a relation of causes. The analogated perfection is not *in se,* or intrinsically analogous. The analogy then is one of improper proportionality not of proper proportionality. For this reason, after having asserted the *existence* of an intellectual light and the sense in which the word *light* ought to be taken in applying it to the vision

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[29] See Zigliara, *op. cit.,* 1, p. 7: ". . . l'intelligibile non è presente alla intelligenza se non per ciò che le si manifesta, cioè le torna illuminato; perocchè manifestato e illuminato, quando trattasi di visioni, sono vocaboli sinonimi."

[30] See Saint Thomas, *Sum. theol.,* q. 67, a. 1: ". . . primo quidem [lux] est institutum ad significandum id quod facit manifestationem in sensu visus; postmodum autem extensum est ad significandum omne illud quod facit manifestationem secundum quamcumque cognitionem. Si ergo accipiatur nomen luminis secundum primam impositionem, metaphorice in spiritualibus dicitur, ut Ambrosius dicit. Si nomen accipiatur secundum quod est in usu loquentium ad omnem manifestationem extensum, sic proprie in spiritualibus dicitur."

of the mind, it is still necessary to examine the *nature* of this light when it is predicated of intellectual vision.

Saint Thomas distinguished in intellective vision the three means necessary to produce it, means called in scholastic language: *sub quo, quo, in quo* (quod).[31] The first, *sub quo,* is placed between the truth and the intellect. It is the principle disposing the intellect to see the intelligible object, just as material light is the principle disposing the eye to see the sense object. The means *sub quo* is the *intellectus agens.* The second, *quo,* is the idea or intelligible species. This is the likeness or similitude of the intelligible object existing in the mind whenever the mind knows. For just as in the sense order it is necessary that there be some similitude of the object of sense, so it is necessary that there be some similitude of the intelligible object in the intellectual order. This likeness, species, similitude, is not the term of the direct act of intellection but is the means for understanding the intelligible object of which it is the likeness, species, or similitude; just as the similitude which is in the sense of the one seeing is not the object seen but the means by which the object is seen. The third means, *in quo* (quod), is any object known inasmuch as it leads the mind to the knowledge of other objects that have some relation to it. In this sense, it is commonly said, that the cause is *seen* in the effect, the thing signified is *seen* in the sign, the conclusion is *seen* in the principle, for the effect is the means of knowing the cause, the sign the means of knowing the thing signified, the principle the means of knowing the truth deduced.

Now, if the word *light* is taken in an extended sense, *Ad significandum omne illud, quod facit manifestationem secundum quaecumque cognitionem,* then the above mentioned means of cognition may be properly called the three *lights* of the mind. However, according to Cardinal Zigliara, Saint Thomas never used the word light to designate the second means, or intelligible ideas.[32] The means *sub quo* is subjective, i.e., a disposition of the knowing subject; while the means *quod* is objective. The difference between

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[31] See Saint Thomas, *Quodlib.* 7, q. 1.

[32] See Zigliara, *op. cit.,* 1, p. 12: "non ricordo infatti aver mai trovato in san Tommaso questa denominazione di luce data alle idee. . . ."

these two lights is of paramount importance. The subjective light is not the object of direct cognition, but falls under the activity of the mind when it turns upon itself by reflection, investigating more profoundly its own faculties. Neither the species nor the subjective light produces the knowledge of the object *mediately,* but by these *media* the object is presented to the intellect *immediately* and is immediately known. The objective light is the first thing that strikes the mind. By the objective light is understood any intelligible object insofar as it leads to the knowledge of other intelligible things *res aliqua per quam in cognitionem alterius devenimus.*[33]

The purpose of this digression was to clear the ground for an investigation of Brownson's use of the analogy. It was deemed necessary because of the indiscriminate and careless use of the metaphor by Brownson. The point at issue is not that Brownson was an ontologist because he hopelessly misunderstood and misconstrued the scholastic use of the analogy, but rather that, taken in the general framework of his thought, there are times when his use of the analogy of light cannot possibly be absolved from the charge of ontologism.

The following quotation is a typical example of Brownson's use of the analogy of light:

> To intellectual vision, as to sensible vision, three things are necessary: the subject, the object, and the light which renders the object intelligible and the subject intelligent. In God the three things are identical in his own being; for he is his own light, intelligible object, and intelligent subject, and needs in order to be infinitely knowing, to go out of himself for nothing. But in creatures it is different. They contain in themselves neither their own light nor their own object, that is, are neither intelligent nor intelligible in or by themselves alone. The light which illumines alike the subject and the object, is not in the intellect any more than in external vision the external light is in the eye. We must, then, distinguish the light from both the subject and the object, when both subject and object are creatures. Now, if we identify the intelligible *forms* or species of the peripatetics with this light, so distinguished,

[33] *Quodlib.* 1, q. 1.

> and say that they represent or show the object in the sense in which the light is truly said to represent or show the object it illumines, and if we further identify this light with the *lumen Dei*,—the light of God,—indistinguishable from the Divine Being, or God himself, we have a very intelligible doctrine, and, as we hold, the true doctrine on the point in question. Is this, after all, the real sense of the peripatetic doctrine?[84]

Brownson's question seems to demand a negative answer. It can readily be conceded that God is his own light, intelligible object, and intelligent subject. It can likewise be conceded that in creatures it is different. It is this difference which is the point at issue here. According to Brownson, creatures "contain in themselves neither their own light nor their own object, that is, are neither intelligent nor intelligible in themselves alone." The use of the word *creatures* is ambiguous; presumably Brownson is speaking of man. In order to enjoy intellectual vision, man must be in possession of an intellectual faculty; just as in order to enjoy sight he must be in possession of a faculty of sight. Therefore it is true to say that man has his own light, taking light in the extended sense explained above. Because his intellect is a faculty of a soul which is the form of the body, man's intellectual knowledge must take its point of departure in the senses. This is the fundamental significance of the axiom *nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu.* This subjective light is the *intellectus agens.*

Brownson adds, "the light which illumines alike the subject and the object, is not in the intellect any more than in external vision the external light is in the eye." Here again Brownson completely ignores the exigencies of the analogy of light. Light is predicated of intellectual vision only in an extended sense, as any principle of intellectual manifestation. In this sense both the intellect and the object can properly be said to be lights. By distinguishing the light from both the subject and the object Brownson has eliminated both the subjective and the objective lights of the intellect. Then he identifies the intelligible forms or species with light and further identifies this light with the *Lumen Dei.* In other words, for the three created media (lights) of intellectual vision, Brownson

[84] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 511.

has substituted the *Lumen Dei.* And since the *Lumen Dei* is indistinguishable from the Divine Being, God becomes the formal principle of intellectual manifestation. This is one of the keystones of ontologism and it is difficult to see how Brownson can escape the ontologistic implication of his use of the analogy of light, for as Father Lepidi points out, "those who teach that the intellective light, in which intelligible truths are formally seen, is in its entity not something of the mind, but something of the object, namely, the very clarity of God which is immediately put before the mind are forced necessarily to admit that the creature knows intelligible truths by the very same operation of the divine intellect formally communicated to intellectual substances."[35]

There is no doubt about the fact that Brownson conceived the light of reason to be the uncreated light of God and not a created participation of this uncreated light. He is aware of the fact that Saint Thomas teaches that the light of reason is a participation of the divine light but he refuses to admit that this participation is created:

> What does he [Saint Thomas] mean by this participated light of God? Does he mean that God himself is the light of reason, "the true light which enlighteneth every man coming into this world." If so, we are aagreed, and St. Thomas holds the very doctrine Gioberti and ourselves have been so severely reproached by modern Thomists for defending. But does he distinguish this light of reason from God, and hold it to be *aliquid creatum,* something created, distinguishable from the light of God, as the creature from the Creator? On this point we are in doubt, and both St. Thomas and Aristotle seem to leave the matter in a most perplexing obscurity.[36]

The point at issue here is not the resolution of Brownson's doubt

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[35] Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. 29: "Qui docent lucem intellectivam, in qua formaliter veritates intelligibiles conspiciuntur, in sua entitate non esse aliquid mentis, sed aliquid objecti, scilicet ipsam claritatem Dei qui immediate objicitur menti; necessario coguntur admittere creaturam cognoscere veritates intelligibiles per ipsammet operationem divini intellectus substantiae intellectivae formaliter communicatem."

[36] "Rationalism and Traditionalism" (1860), *Works,* I, 512.

as to what Saint Thomas taught. Nor is it the alleged "perplexing obscurity" of Aristotle and the Angelic Doctor. But rather it is the indubitable fact that for Brownson the light of reason is not something created but is rather the uncreated light of God. This not only is ontologism but it is also the reason why none of the scholastics "are willing to say plainly, that the light of reason which illumines both the subject and object, making the subject intelligent and the object intelligible, is the uncreated but all-creating light of God, and, as God is *ens simplicissimum,* indistinguishable from his own being, which is light in and by itself."[37]

There are other passages in which Brownson clearly states that God Himself, and not a created participation in the light of God is the *lumen rationis:*

> . . . in the intelligible world, we really and truly see God; he is the primary and immediate object of the intellect, and the medium by which we intellectually see all else that we do intellectually see, understand, or know, but not as he is in himself; for if we cannot look into the sun, which is but the shadow of his light, without being struck blind, how much less can we look into him who is light itself; nor do we know him by himself alone, that is, apart from his works, but we know him in knowing objects, which are made intelligible objects only in and by his intelligibility, as they are made existence only by and in his creative act, or omnipotent power.[38]

Passages such as this are difficult to understand because of their ambiguous, conflicting, and contradictory terminology. To say that God is the primary and immediate object of the intellect is unadulterated ontologism. To say that "God is the medium by which we intellectually see all else that we do intellectually see" is to attribute to God the role of ideas in human cognition.

Brownson, whether he is aware of it or not, is teaching that the mind sees all things in God whenever he substitutes God for the phantasms and intelligible species in human cognition:

> A little meditation on the fact that God has created all things by his own power from nothing, would speedily

[37] *Ibid.,* p. 512.

[38] "An A Priori Autobiography" (1850), *Works,* I, 251.

> have made away with these intermeddling phantasms and intelligible species, annihilated this *mundus logicus* unnecessarily interposed between subject and object, by showing that whatever is not *thing* is *nothing,* that whatever thing —entity in scholastic language—is not creature is God, and that his intelligible light indistinguishable from him, is the only medium between the cognitive faculty and its object, that can be asserted or conceived.[39]

In other words, the medium of knowledge is not something created but rather the uncreated light of God which Brownson very properly identifies with God, Himself. If God takes the place of the phantasms and intelligible species in human creation then the mind sees all things in God. It is difficult to see how this differs from ontologism. Brownson insists that the mind stands face to face with reality, and hence, it would seem face to face with God:

> Correcting these mistakes, dismissing their vexatious phantasms and intelligible species, and understanding that we stand face to face with reality, whether corporeal or incorporeal, spiritual or material, intelligible or sensible, with nothing but the intelligible light of God between as the medium of both intelligible and sensible intuition, they might easily find themselves in accord with the Catholic ontologists, and their philosophy corresponding to the order of things.[40]

In another passage Brownson writes:

> To intellectual vision as to external, there are necessary the intellect, the object, and the light. As to the purely intelligible, Being, it is intelligible *per se,* by its own light, and a mediating light distinct from the mind and the object is needed only in apprehending existences, and the light by which we see these is the same Divine light of Being, diffused over them by the Divine creative act. But as we apprehend not the purely intelligible in itself, owing to its excess of light and our weakness, we apprehend God only in the light of his creative act, and therefore only

[39] "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 282.
[40] *Ibid.,* p. 290.

> in relation to the things he has made. But as that light proceeds from his essence, and is simply his relation *ad extra* to the things he has made, in apprehending it we do really apprehend him. We apprehend them, not by their phantasms, but by his light, which through the creative act illumines them. And thus, while we maintain that we do really apprehend him, we do not pretend any more than our scholastic friends that we apprehend him separate from the apprehension of his works.[41]

Brownson does not say clearly to what intellect Being, or God, is intelligible *per se*. In Himself, God, is indeed the most intelligible of beings, but His intellect alone is proportionate to this supreme intelligibility. Presumably when Brownson says that "a mediating light distinct from the mind and the object is needed only in apprehending existences" he implies that no mediating light distinct from the mind and its object is necessary to apprehend God. This is not even true of the Beatific Vision in which the *lumen gloriae* is distinct from the mind. If it were true of the intellect *in via* then ontologism would necessarily follow.

However, Brownson immediately rejects this obvious conclusion by stating that we do not apprehend the purely intelligible in itself but only in relation to the things He has made. This is extremely ambiguous. What is the light of God's creative act? *Ex parte Dei*, divine creative causality is identical with the Divine essence. If the mind were to apprehend God in the light of His creative act in this sense then it would see all things in God. On the other hand, passively considered, creation consists in the real relation of dependence which creatures bear to God. The whole tenor of the third chapter shows that Brownson rejected passive creation as a means of arriving at the existence of God. It follows then that in Brownson's thought the light of God's creative act is God Himself. So instead of inferring the existence of God from the radical insufficiency of creatures to account for their own existence (i.e., from creation passively considered), Brownson tries to establish the existence of God by means of God's creative act (i.e., from creation actively considered) and such a procedure seems to lead inevitably to some form of ontologism. Moreover when he adds, "but as that

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 304.

light proceeds from his essence, and is simply his relation *ad extra* to the things he has made," he implies that there is a real relation between God and creatures, whereas the relation on the part of God, is only a relation of reason. It is true that in the last sentence of the quotation under discussion Brownson seems to imply a mediate knowledge of God but this mediate knowledge does not follow from the principles he lays down.

In another place Brownson speaks of a natural vision of God which is direct and immediate:

> He [Père Gratry] fears, most likely, that, were he to say that we have intuition of God here, he would fall into a condemned heresy, and be thought to teach that we are naturally capable of the beatific vision, and may even naturally enjoy it on earth. But we think this fear is groundless. To have intuition of God as the ideal, the intelligible, is, in our judgment, something very different from having intuition of him as he is in himself, or in his essence, and we think may be asserted without danger to faith; for it is asserted by St. Augustine, St. Bonaventura, Père Thomassin, and Cardinal Gerdil, and implied by St. Thomas, and in reality by M. Gratry himself.[42]

It is obvious that men in this life do not have the beatific vision but it is not so obvious that M. Gratry's fear of using the term intuition of God is groundless. Brownson distinguishes the intuition of God as the idea, the intelligible, from intuition of God in His essence, but he does not indicate how the two are so very different. Intelligible means knowable by the intellect. If the mind has intuition of God as the intelligible then it has intuition of God in His essence. But because God is not a proportionate object of the human intellect it can have not an immediate but only a mediate knowledge of God in this life. Brownson's appeal to St. Augustine, St. Bonaventura, Père Thomassin, Cardinal Gerdil and Saint Thomas is made without any reference to the places in which these authors presumably teach intuition of God as the intelligible. Moreover, the introduction of Cardinal Gerdil's name along with the other gives

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[42] "Gratry on the Knowledge of God" (1855), *Works*, I, 336.

rise to a certain amount of hesitation. For if they all hold what Cardinal Gerdil holds (and this seems to be what Brownson is implying) then they are all ontologists.

A little further on, Brownson repeats himself with a few more qualifications added:

> He [Père Gratry] does not like to say that we have intuition of God, we suppose, because he finds that word consecrated by the theologians to the view of God in his essence, which the saints have in the beatific vision; but he maintains with St. Augustine, the Greek Fathers, and all great Catholic philosophers, that God is himself the principle and end of our reason, and that he is the immediate object of reason, not as he is in himself indeed, but as the intelligible and the desirable, or the objective light of reason, and seen by reason as the eye sees the light in seeing the object it illumines. We call this view of God intuitive, for in it God immediately, directly, without any thing interposed between his light and the eye of the soul, presents and affirms his own being; but *Père Gratry* calls it an indirect, an implicit view of God, which proves to us that he confounds the intuitive order with the reflective.[43]

Brownson repeatedly assures his readers that:

> No man in his senses maintains that the intuitive vision of God enjoyed by the Blest is possible by the simple light of natural reason, or even by natural reason illuminated by the supernatural light of faith.[44]

But in terms not so reassuring he insists upon speaking of a natural intuition of God:

> We assert by the natural intuition of God nothing of the sort. That vision is intrinsic, the view of God as he is in himself, his own interior life and essence; but our natural intuition of God is extrinsic, apprehensive, not comprehensive, and is a view of God as he is in relation

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[43] "Gratry's Logic" (1856), *Works,* I, 370.

[44] "Maret on Reason and Revelation" (1857), *Works,* I, 442.

> to our intellect, as the principle and immediate object of our intelligence, not as he is in himself, or in his essence.[45]

Brownson distinguishes the intuitive vision of God which is proper to the Blessed in Heaven from what he calls the natural intuition of God. There is an unfortunate confusion and lack of theological precision in this distinction. The fact that he calls this natural intuition of God apprehensive and not comprehensive seems to imply that he considers the intuitive vision of God enjoyed by the Blessed to be comprehensive. The use of the word intuition in regard to the Blessed primarily designates the directness of their vision of God in contrast to the indirect, mediate, abstract, analogical knowledge of God proper to the mind here on earth. But the intuitive vision of God in Heaven is not comprehensive for that is reserved to God alone. Moreover, the human intellect bears the same relation to God as all created things. The relation is real *ex parte intellectus creati* but only a relation of reason *ex parte Dei.* As Father Lepidi explains, when the soul knows God, "it is God, who as principal cause perfects the soul; it is God, who affects the soul through the vicarious similitude of himself; and finally it is God who is the objective term of cognition, known nevertheless in an imperfect and constricted manner, according to a similitude and proportion to creatures."[46] But Brownson has eliminated the phantasms and intelligible species and has placed the mind in immediate contact with reality, and therefore when he speaks of God being the immediate object of natural intuition ontologism seems inescapable.

It is not always possible to free Brownson's version of the *intellectus agens* from the charge of ontologism:

> St. Thomas, if we understand him, does not regard the *intellectus agens* as a created intellect, but as our participation of the Divine, uncreated intellect, that is to say,

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[45] *Ibid.,* p. 442.

[46] Lepidi, *op. cit.,* p. 99: "Deus est, qui ut causa principalis perficit animam; Deus est, qui afficit animam per vicariam similitudinem sui; Deus denique est terminum objectivus cognitionis, cognitus tamen modo imperfecto et diminuto, secundum similitudinem et proportionem ad creaturas."

> God himself in his relation to our intellect, or as we say, God as the Intelligible.[47]

The *intellectus agens* is the subjective light of reason. In the Angelic Doctor's thought it is a *quaedam participatio luminis increati Dei.* But the participation is a created participation. Whatever might be said about the intrinsic merits of the Thomistic epistemology it cannot be denied that in this system the *intellectus agens* is a created entity. The *quaedam participatio* saves Saint Thomas from Pantheism but no such qualification is apparent in Brownson's exposition of the *intellectus agens.* If the *intellectus agens* is uncreated then pantheistic ontologism is inevitable. Hence it is by no means safe to say, as Brownson does:

> The *intellectus agens,* supposed to furnish the representative ideas, if not the human intellect, as St. Thomas certainly did not hold it to be, is itself the idea, and the idea is not the representative of the intelligible reality, but that reality itself. The ideas are in that intellect, and it presents them in presenting itself intuitively to our intellect, and hence the *intellectus agens* of Aristotle and the schoolmen is identically the intelligible, or God affirming himself intuitvely as the Intelligible. . . .[48]

In this passage Brownson identifies the *intellectus agens* with ideas and ideas with God and this is equivalently making God the formal principle of human cognition, which is ontologism.

Brownson assures his readers that they will escape pantheism and assert the true principle of science, if they understand that:

> . . . the intelligible, the *intellectus agens,* the objective reason, is truly and literally God immanent in our intellect, and that his immanence is his creative immanence or presence, or that his permanent affirmation of himself in intuition is his presence creating the intellect at the same time that it is its object, . . .[49]

Perhaps it is possible to escape pantheism but it is not so easy

[47] "Maret on Reason and Revelation" (1856), *Works,* I, 447.
[48] *Ibid.,* p. 449.
[49] *Ibid.,* p. 455.

to escape ontologism. If God is literally and truly immanent in the intellect as the intelligible then the mind must intuitively see God. Moreover if God is the *intellectus agens* then some form of pantheistic ontologism necessarily follows.

Brownson seems to have held that because God created the intellect of man he must therefore be its immediate object and light:

> The Divine reason, indistinguishable from the divine essence or being, at once creates the human reason and presents itself as its light and its immediate object.[50]

> . . . Man is intelligent, is a rational existence, only by virtue of the immediate presence of God, simultaneously the creator, the object, and the light of his reason. This is the doctrine I now hold, and which I am supposed to have borrowed from Gioberti, but which I held before Gioberti had published it, and long before I had seen his writings or heard his name.[51]

> We beg our readers to recall here what we have so often asserted and demonstrated, namely, that man knows that God is, only because he affirms himself in and to natural reason, as at once its creator, light, and immediate object.[52]

God is not the immediate object of the human intellect. There is no proportion between the finite intellect and the infinite God. God can be known only mediately, imperfectly, and analogically in this life. The light of the intellect is not the uncreated light of God but rather a created participation of this light. Moreover, Brownson conceives the affirmation of God to the intellect as being made by the creative act of God and this is once more reducible to ontologism. He writes:

> Certainly we cannot comprehend the creative act, but it does not therefore follow, that we have not an intuitive apprehension of it as the *nexus* that unites being and

[50] "The Convert" (1857), *Works,* V, 129.
[51] *Ibid.,* p. 137.
[52] "Maret on Reason and Revelation" (1856), *Works,* I, 477.

> existence. There is no more mystery in *ens creans* than in simply *ens,* and it is only through *ens creans* or being creating our intelligence and presenting *ens* as its immediate object and light, that *ens* or being itself is perceived by us, for otherwise there would be no *us.*[53]

Brownson maintains that the creative act of God is the *nexus* between being (God) and existence (creatures). The creative act of God is obviously God Himself. If the mind has intuitive apprehension of the creative act of God then it has intuitive apprehension of God.

Brownson's use of the analogy of light is not the only instance in which the charge of ontologism seems justified. His use of the terms *ens, esse, essentia, existentia* is subject to the same charge. In the traditional philosophy represented by Saint Thomas *ens* is an analogical concept. In this Brownson saw an unphilosophical use of the term. He held that being is a univocal, not an analogical term.[54] This makes his metaphysical position absolutely irreconcilable with that of the Angelic Doctor. In order to appraise properly Brownson's use of these terms a whole treatise on metaphysics would be necessary. Here the intention is to show that his use of these words is not always capable of being absolved from the charge of ontologism.

Brownson maintained that "There is a philosophy in language which can never be disregarded without more or less injury to the philosophy of things."[55] Whatever there may be of truth in this principle, the etymological approach to the concept of *ens* can in no wise exhaust the metaphysical richness of the concept of being. Grammatically *ens* is a participle of the verb *esse. Esse* may signify the act of existing as in the proposition *Deus est.* In this sense it is synonymous with *Existere* and *to be.* It may signify the essence of a thing, i.e., *id quod est,* as in the expression *esse divinum, esse humanum.* Finally it may signify the copula in a proposition as, *man is mortal,* in which sense it pertains to logic. *Ens* as a participle (*formaliter*) includes *esse* (*existere*) in *actu exercito,* i.e., it

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[53] "Primitive Elements of Thought" (1859), *Works,* I, 427.
[54] See *ibid.,* p. 423.
[55] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 405.

connotes the existence of the act signified by the verb. *Ens* as a noun (*materialiter*) designates the essence or the subject which has order *ad esse,* but prescinds from the question whether the essence actually has existence or not. Hence *ens,* as a noun, signifies *ens in actu signato,* i.e., it is denominated by the act of being without affirming or denying the exercise of this act. Briefly, *ens,* as a participle, is *id quod actu est; ens,* as a noun, is *id quod est vel esse potest.* The object of metaphysics is *ens* as a noun, and can be *described* as *id cui esse quocumque modo competit.* In the *philosophia perennis, ens* as a noun is not a universal concept but a transcendental concept, hence it can be applied to anything that is or can be. Moreover, because it is not equivocal nor univocal, but analogical, it can be properly predicated of God and creatures.

This scholastic precision is completely lacking in Brownson's metaphysical equipment. This makes it extremely difficult to disengage the exact meaning Brownson attached to these terms. At times he believed that essenses are superintelligible:

> We never know the essences of things. We may know their visible appearances, their external qualities and attributes, but the inner essence, the real *quidditas* of the things always escapes us, and is to us really superintelligible, alike in the natural order and in the supernatural order.[56]

> The essence of things are in all cases superintelligible, even the essences of created or natural things, but there is no thing without its essence, for the essence is that by virtue of which a thing is what it is.[57]

Brownson distinguished existence from being, "Existence as distinguished from being is that which is not in itself but in another, and has being only by virtue of the creative act of him in whom it is."[58] In another place he says:

> Existence etymologically expresses a derivation from another (exstare), and implies that it has not its being or

[56] "Faith and Reason" (1863), *Works,* III, 578-579.
[57] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 240.
[58] "The Existence of God" (1852), *Works,* I, 269.

> its cause in itself. It is a word admirably formed to express a dependence on, and distinction from, Being. It is distinct from Being, but dependent on it, and inseparable from it without annihilation, as is the effect in relation to the cause, or the creature to the creator. While then we apply *esse* to God, we use *existere* in relation to contingents or creatures.[59]

> We have in language two words which serve us to mark the precise difference between that which is in, from, and by itself alone, and that which exists in, from and by being. The first is *being* and the other is *existence*. Being is properly applied only to God, who is, not Supreme Being, as is often said, but the one only being, the only one that can say, I Am That AM, or *Qui Est*: and it shows how strictly language represents the real order that in no tongue can we make an assertion without the verb *to be,* that is, only by being, that is, again, only by God Himself.[60]

The general principle of Brownson's epistemology that there are no abstractions in nature is applied likewise to his metaphysical concept of being, "being in general, *ens in genere,* is inconceivable, and is not only an abstraction, but even an impossible abstraction."[61] Neither *esse* nor *existere,* nor Brownson's use of them adequately expresses the precise difference between God and creatures. If *ens* is taken as a participle then *esse* (*existere, to be*) can be predicated properly both of God and creatures. The fact that Brownson used *existences* in preference to *existence* to designate creatures[62] indicates that he is using *existere* not as a verb to signify the act of existence but as a noun to signify that which exists. In this sense his terminology is equivalent to the scholastic "essence." When he endeavors to indicate the precise difference between Being (God) and existence (creatures) his terminology reveals its complete inadequacy to express the metaphysical realities involved. For *ens* in this sense is applicable both to God and to

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[59] "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 262.

[60] "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 390.

[61] "The Problem of Causality" (1855), *Works,* I, 400; see "Professor Bascom's Lectures" (1873), *Works,* II, 499.

[62] See "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 405.

creatures. Strictly speaking *ens reale est id quod habet esse in rerum natura.* And, *ens reale dividitur in ens a se* (*ens increatum, Deum*) *et ens ab alio* (*ens creatum*).

Yet Brownson protested, "earnestly, in the name both of philology and philosophy, against calling existences, which are nothing except by the creative act of God, *beings,* and still more earnestly against so calling the product of second or third causes. We know the schoolmen did so, but they are not to be commended for it."[63] The schoolmen may not be commended for so doing but they will never be condemned for so doing, while Brownson's use of the word is extremely liable to the charge of ontologism. The scholastic protests earnestly against not calling existences (creatures) beings. For since the human mind conceives everything it does conceive *ad instar entis* it is impossible to escape ontologism in restricting being to God.

There seems to be no doubt but that in some instances Brownson used the verb *to be* in a pantheistic sense:

> We have only to eliminate from our minds the conceptions that transport the relations of space and time to the Creator, or represent them as relation between Creator and creature, where the only relation is that of cause and effect, and to regard the creative act as having no relations of space and time, to be able to understand how the divine judgment, intuitively affirmed, is at once the principle of the real and of the scientific, and the creative act, the copula of being and existence, is the copula of every judgment or thought, as is proved by the fact already noted, that in no language can an assertion be made without the verb to be, that is, without God.[64]

> The creative act is the copula of every strictly logical judgment.[65]

> The verb *to be* is precisely the name of God himself, the *Sum qui Sum.* We cannot make, then a single assertion but by the divine Being, and he enters as the copula

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[63] *Ibid., loc. cit.*
[64] *Ibid.,* p. 397.
[65] *Ibid.,* p. 399.

> into every one of our judgments without which no affirmation can be expressed.[66]

Brownson would be the first one to object to the pantheistic implication of his use of the verb *to be*. But he failed to assert clearly, simply, and unequivocally that the verb to be is used in two different manners.

> "Esse" is used in two different ways, it signifies the act of existing (*actus essendi*) ; and in the second it signifies the composition of a proposition at which the soul arrives by joining a predicate with a subject. Taking to be in the first way, we cannot know the *to be* of God (*esse Dei*), anymore than we can know his essence, but in the second way only. For we know that the proposition we are forming about God, when we say : God is, is a true proposition, and we know this from His effects.[67]

Brownson not only failed to make this distinction but actually denied the second member of it.

In Brownson's thought *ens* equals God (real and necessary being) and *existentias* equals creatures (contingent beings). In explaining the relation of God and creatures to thought Brownson clearly adopts an ontological position. "What cannot exist alone cannot be thought alone."[68] Brownson repeated this principle throughout all his speculation on the existence of God. He expressed it in different ways and from different points of view. So, in one instance, it becomes the reason why he rejected both the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* approach to the existence of God.

> They who take the necessary as their principium can conclude from it only the necessary, not the contingent,

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 423.

[67] Saint Thomas, *Sum. theol.*, I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2m: "Dicendum quod esse dupliciter dicitur: uno modo, significat actum essendi; alio modo, significat compositionem propositionis, quam anima adinvenit coniungens praedicatum subiecto. Primo igitur modo accipiendo esse, non possumus scire esse Dei, sicut nec eius essentiam; sed solum secundo modo. Scimus enim quod haec propositio quam formamus de Deo, cum dicimus: Deus est, vera est. Et hoc scimus ex eius effectibus, ut supra q. 2, a. 2 dictum est."

[68] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works*, II, 50.

> and hence the pure ontologists, who attempt by logical deduction from real and necessary being alone to obtain the contingent, inevitably fall into pantheism. It is equally impossible to conclude, by logical induction, real and necessary being from the contingent. Deduction from the contingent can give only the contingent, and induction can give only a generalization, which remains always in the order of the particulars generalized. Hence those who make the contingent their principium, if consequent, inevitably fall into atheism.[69]

In another instance it becomes the means whereby Brownson sought to explain how the mind forms its conception of real and necessary beings:

> The fact is, in every intuition we have direct and immediate intuition of both the infinite and the finite, of the necessary and the contingent, of God and the creature, and by disregarding or mentally suppressing the finite we only detach the infinite from the finite presented along with it in the same intuition, and turn our minds to its direct and distinct consideration. We do not thus obtain it originally, but we thus obtain it as a distinct conception.[70]

At this point Brownson's thought seems to coincide with the proponents of the ontological argument of Saint Anselm. But Brownson does not leave it at this point, he proceeds to identify the idea of God with God:

> As to the argument of the *Proslogium,* its validity depends on the sense in which the word *idea* is taken. If we take it in a psychological sense, as a mere mental conception, the argument may be a logical puzzle, but concludes nothing.
>
> If we suppose idea can exist *in intellectu* without existing *in re* the argument concludes at best only a psychological abstraction; but if we suppose the mental idea to be the intuition of the real and objective, as we have just said, it is valid and conclusive.[71]

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[69] *Ibid.,* p. 58.

[70] "Gratry on the Knowledge of God" (1855), *Works,* I, 336.

[71] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 38.

Saint Anselm's argument may be a logical puzzle to Brownson but his emendation of it is no less puzzling to a psychologist. If the mental idea is intuition of the real and objective without any intermeddling phantasms and intelligible species and if the intelligible light of God is the only medium between the cognitive faculty and its object,[72] then the mind has intuitive vision of God.

Brownson considered it a mistake to suppose that the finite is apprehensible in itself without the apprehension of the infinite:

> What is not intelligible cannot be apprehended, and without the infinite the finite does not exist, and there is nothing finite for the intellect to apprehend. If only being is intelligible, . . . we can apprehend things only as they are; and as the finite is not without the infinite, it cannot be apprehended without apprehension of the infinite.[73]

> Professor Hill's system rejects the doctrine, that we have direct intuition of real and necessary being even as the ideal, and his ontology is derived from the apprehension or direct knowledge of contingent existences. It is from the intuition of creatures that he concludes the necessity and the fact of the creator; as from effect we conclude the cause. We need not develop the argument, for everybody knows it, and wonders at its inefficiency in convincing the atheist. The existence of an effect supposes a cause; of creature, supposes a creator; of the contingent, supposes the necessary. Of this there is and can be no doubt. No atheist even disputes it. But this is not the question. The real question is, Are contingent existences intelligible or cognizable in themselves or by themselves alone?[74]

Brownson has a habit of asking himself significant questions. It is precisely his answers to these questions which reveal his true philosophical position. The answer to the last question will determine the further question as to whether the human intellect can prove the existence of God by its native power. It really sits in judgment on the *quinque viae* of Saint Thomas and the definition

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[72] See "Schools of Philosophy" (1854), *Works,* I, 290-291.
[73] "Gratry's Logic" (1856), *Works,* I, 365.
[74] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 527.

of the Vatican Council. Without the slightest hesitation and in the clearest possible manner Brownson proceeds to give a negative answer. This, if true, makes any *a posteriori* demonstration of the existence of God metaphysically impossible:

> If contingents can be known in or by themselves alone, we wish the professor would tell us how from the intuition of them he can conclude the necessary, or why the necessary is requisite to explain their existence. If the effect, in and by itself, is intelligible, intuition or knowledge of it can furnish no indication that it cannot exist in and of itself—can suggest neither the fact nor the necessity of cause or reason of its existence beyond itself. It is because effects are unintelligible in and by themselves, that we conclude they are caused; it is because they are inconceivable without something that has caused them, that we infer from them a creator.[75]

> But we repeat that what is not is not intelligible. What is not is nothing; and nothing, with all deference to the able and learned editor-in-chief of *The Catholic World,* cannot be even an object of thought, therefore is not intelligible, for intelligibleness is in being, not in not-being. Hence we maintain that science is of the real, not of the unreal; that the principles of science and the principles of things or reality, are identical. Therefore, as we have already said and shown, things must be known, if known at all, as they really exist, and in their real relation. Creatures, contingent existences, do not exist in themselves. "Le realtà contingenti non sono per sè intelligibili, ma soltanto in virtù dell'idea eterna," says Professor Rossi, C.M., who adds in a note: "Se il contingente non ha in sè la ragione della sua existenza non è per sè intelligibile; perchè l'intelligibilità d'una cosa giace nella sua ragione."[76]

The first part of the third chapter showed that Brownson missed the point of the *quinque viae* and hence there is little cause to wonder at what he considered its inefficiency to convince an atheist. The fact that he missed the analogical nature of being reveals why

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[75] *Ibid.,* pp. 527-528.
[76] *Ibid.,* pp. 528-529.

he was unable to see how the mind can go from the things which are made to Him who made them. These quotations are another instance of Brownson's application of the principle *what cannot exist alone cannot be known alone.* This time it takes a slightly different form, i.e., that creatures are unintelligible in themselves. Existences, contingent beings, finite things, effects, are all unintelligible in themselves. Therefore they can be intelligible only in God and some species of Malebranche's vision of God becomes necessary to account for the knowledge of things.

Brownson was without a doubt correct when he said that intelligibility is in being. But for him *being* was real and necessary being, or God. Recalling that for Brownson the creative act of God is the medium by which God and creatures are known or knowable, his argument, for the sake of brevity, can be cast into the following form. *Things are intelligible because they exist. But they have their existence from God. Therefore they are intelligible only if they are seen in the creative act of God.* Both the major and the minor of this argument can be conceded, but the conclusion does not follow. For from the fact that things exist, and have their existence from God, it does not follow that they must be seen in the creative act of God.

The intelligibility of things (contingent beings, existences) can be inferred from the consequences of its denial. A thing is intelligible insofar as it exists. Finite things either have their own true and proper existence and thence their own true and proper intelligibility, or they lack the former and hence also the latter. On the basis of the principle that finite, created things are unintelligible in themselves, it is necessary to deny them reality and to affirm that only *Esse Absolutum* exists and everything else is either pure phenomenon or a real manifestation of this Absolute Being. It seems then that the scholastic position, which places intelligibility in the being of things rather than in the being of God, is much more correct. Things are intelligible because they have their own *esse.* The *esse rerum* is infinitely different from the *esse Dei.* Therefore finite things are intelligible in themselves and it is not necessary that in order for them to be known at all that they must be known in God.

A final fundamental objection to Brownson's contention that

finite things are unintelligible in themselves is that it presupposes that the order of cognition is the same as the order of reality:

> . . . things must be known if known at all, as they really exist and in their real relations.[77]
>
> Now, as the principles of science and the principles of things are identical, it follows necessarily that we do and can know only the real; things only as they are, only in the order and relation in which they actually exist.[78]

This sounds very much like the pantheistic axiom of Spinoza *ordo et connexio idearum idem est ac ordo et connexio rerum.* At any rate it is difficult to see how Brownson's use of it can be absolved of ontologism. For in the order and relation in which things actually exist God is first, and therefore on Brownson's principle God must be first in the order of cognition. Moreover, as was pointed out in discussing Brownson's distinction between intuitive and reflective thought, he completely ignored the fact that cognition is uniquely an immanent vital operation. As such it proceeds from the subject, not from the object. Any action must proceed according to the nature of the agent of which the action is an effect, not according to the nature of the object about which it is concerned. In thought the object is not the effect of cognition but the term. To maintain that cognition ought to evolve according to the order of the object is to maintain that the object, as it actually exists, is the principle of cognition. Or, as Brownson puts it, "the relation of object and subject in the fact of thought is the relation of cause and effect. The object actualizes or creates the subject, not the subject the object."[79] On this supposition the act of cognition proceeds from the object known and not from the subject knowing. God then becomes not only the efficient cause of the intellect but also the intrinsic principle of its actual cognition.

Taken in the general framework of his thought, Brownson's use of the principle that the mind must know things in the relation and order in which they actually exist seems necessarily to lead to ontologism. According to Brownson, God and existences embrace

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 529.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 518.

[79] "Essay in Refutation of Atheism" (1873), *Works,* II, 63.

all reality. Existences (creatures) are unintelligible *in se*.[80] Only Being (God) is intelligible *in se*.[81] Therefore the mind must see all things in God. Nor does the distinction between God and the creative act of God save Brownson from ontologism. For, as has been pointed out, he rejected creation in the passive sense as a means of arriving at the existence of God. Therefore he must take creation in the active sense in which sense it is identical with God. So instead of going from a knowledge of creatures to a knowledge of the existence of God, Brownson goes from God to creatures. This is the same as saying that the logical procession of ideas is the same as the ontological procession of things, which is ontologism.

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[80] See "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, *262*; also "Porter's Human Intellect" (1869), *Works,* II, 389.

[81] See "Gratry on the Knowledge of God" (1855), *Works,* I, 346; also "The Giobertian Philosophy" (1864), *Works,* II, 262.

SUMMARY

It has been the object of this dissertation to examine Orestes Brownson's approach to the problem of God in the light of the principles of Saint Thomas and the relevant decisions of the Church.

To evaluate properly the *quinque viae* of Saint Thomas an accurate knowledge of his ontology and psychology is indispensable. It has been shown that Brownson completely missed the analogical character of being and presented at best a distorted version of the rational psychology of the Angelic Doctor. On this basis it would seem that Brownson's rejection of the traditional method of proving the existence of God, while becoming subjectively intelligible, still remains objectively invalid.

The fundamental objection raised by Brownson against the *quinque viae* is that they make an illegitimate use of the principle of causality. Brownson admitted the Kantian origin of this objection and consistently maintained that the principle of causality is a synthetic *a priori* judgment. He clearly saw that the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* led inevitably to subjectivism but he failed to see that there is a radical contradiction in the very idea of a synthetic *a priori* judgment. For this reason he would never admit that the principle of causality is in any way derivable from experience. As a result it might be said that his attempt to find an objective basis for Kant's synthetic *a priori* judgment conditioned all Brownson's speculation on the existence of God.

Another objection Brownson raised against the *quinque viae* was that they make an illegitimate inference from the particular to the universal, the contingent to the necessary, etc. In this he failed to grasp the fact that each one of the five ways is an attempt to find the proper cause of universal and permanent effects and not the proper cause of particular and transitory effects. His criticism of the argument from design, besides being a mere paraphrase of Kant, is but a particular example of his general objection.

Moreover Brownson's insistence that the finite cannot be known

without the infinite, the contingent without the necessary, etc., seems to uncover an ontologistic vein in his own approach to the problem of God. Brownson denied that the mind can rise to a knowledge of God from created things. In so doing he is denying a proposition which has at least the character of certain doctrine. For the Church has expressly defined that the mind is capable of so arising to the knowledge of God. It was this position which determined *a priori* Brownson's exegsis of Saint Paul and also his interpretation of Saint Thomas.

Therefore it seems safe to conclude that Brownson's failure to grasp the metaphysical and psychological principles involved in the traditional demonstration of the existence of God is sufficient to account for his rejection of the *a posteriori* approach, but that Brownson's rejection in no wise destroys the objective validity of the *a posteriori* approach.

After reducing the *quinque viae* to the category of "inconclusive proofs" Brownson proceeded to establish the existence of God by an "unfamiliar method of demonstration." This consists in identifying by reflection and reasoning, necessary ideas (ideal intuition) with real, necessary, universal and immutable being, and then identifying the latter with God. His demonstration is not so much a proof of the existence of God as an attempt to establish certain philosophical prerequisites for his process of double identification, presuming that once these are admitted the existence of God is evident.

His point of departure is an analysis of thought which completely ignores the abstractive character of intellectual knowledge. His assertion that Kantian subjectivism is refuted and the objectivity of knowledge guaranteed by placing the synthetic *a priori* judgments on the side of the object rests on the gratuitous assumption that the object presents itself to the mind as it actually exists *in re*. His identification of real and necessary ideas with real and necessary being rests on a psychologically unsound theory of ideas. Precisely because his unfamiliar method of demonstration rests on these untenable philosophical prerequisites, it seems safe to conclude that Brownson failed to prove by "unanswerable arguments" the existence of God.

Moreover there are elements in Brownson's speculation on the existence of God which bear unmistakable resemblance to ontologism. In many instances Brownson was seemingly unaware of the ontologism, implicit or explicit, in the writings of such men as Père Malebranche, Vincenzo Gioberti, Cardinal Gerdil, Père Branchereau. There are times when Brownson speaks of the *lumen rationis,* the *intellectus agens,* in such wise that he cannot possibly be absolved from ontologism. He rejected the *a posteriori* approach to the existence of God and constructed his unfamiliar method of demonstration on the principle, "what cannot exist alone cannot be known alone," or, as he often expressed it, "creatures are unintelligible in themselves." These principles have been shown to be fundamentally ontologistic. Moreover, he seemed to accept the necessary corollary of this position, namely that "the order of cognition must follow the order of being." These aspects of Brownson's speculation on the existence of God cannot be safely taught.

In concluding that Brownson's contribution to the problem of the existence of God rests on unsound and unsafe philosophical principles the author has been guided throughout by Brownson's own advice, "we must judge all systems, not by the intentions, or even formal assertions, of their authors, but by the principles which they maintain."[1] On this basis the conclusion that Brownson never successfully managed to demonstrate the existence of God seems inescapable.

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[1] "Father Hill's Philosophy" (1875), *Works,* II, 512.

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